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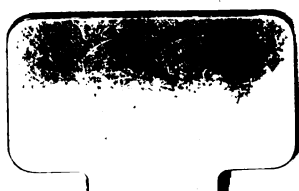
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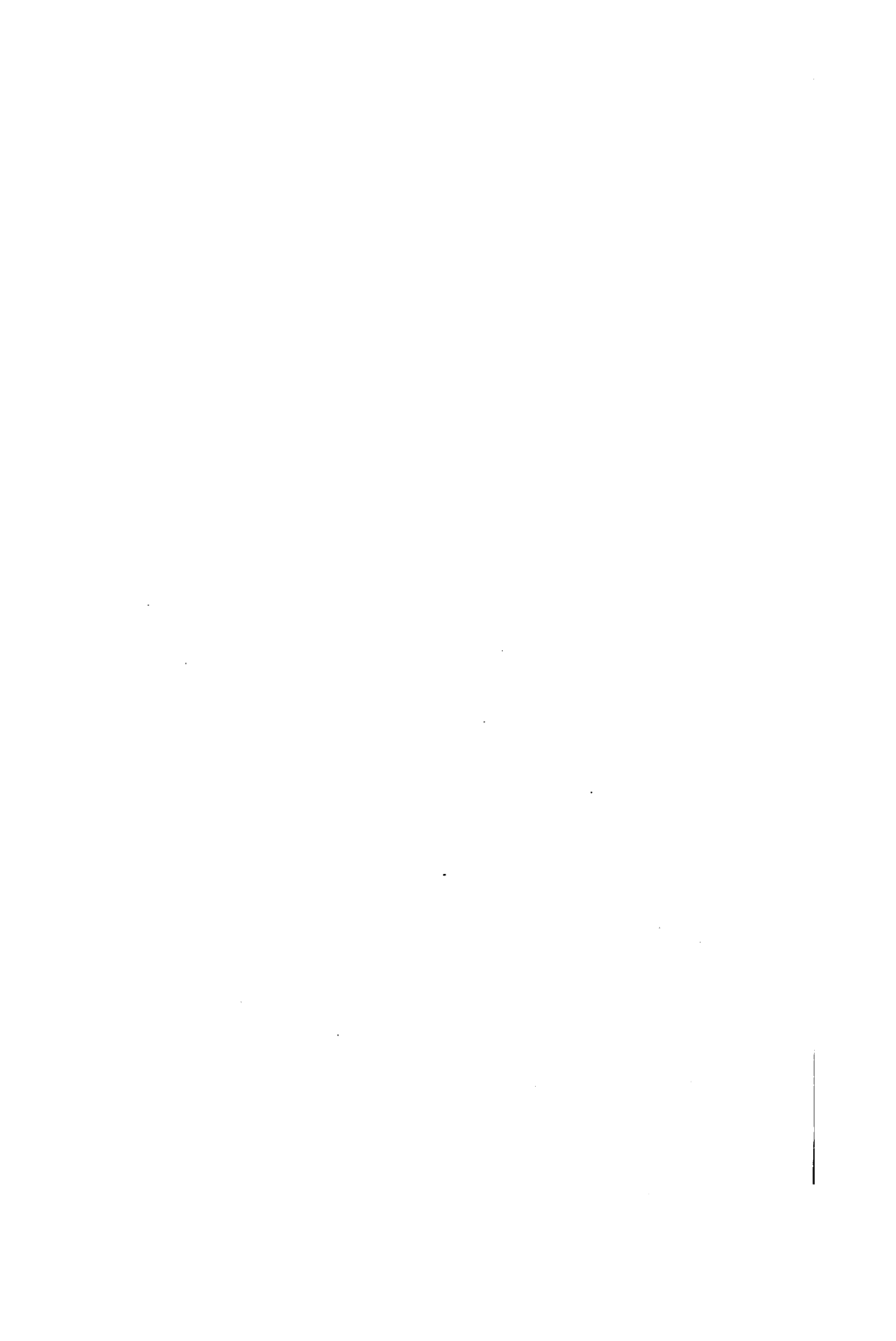
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DUMBLETON COMMON.

BY

THE HON^{BLE} ELEANOR EDEN.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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DUMBLETON COMMON.

CHAPTER I.

THE VIRTUOUS GENTLEWOMAN.

“ She rose,
Her arms upon her breast across, and stood
A virtuous gentlewoman deeply wrong'd,
Upright and flushed before him ; then she said,
‘ There must be now no passages of love
Betwixt us twain, henceforward evermore.’ ”

TENNYSON.

AFTER dinner, the ladies went out on the lawn, to stroll about under the fine, old, cedar trees and to drink iced coffee. Mr. Quilp

honoured them with his company, and trotted about after his mistress as fast as his little bandy legs could carry him.

"Dear me! how I wish I had a cigarette," cried Lady Diana. "I should like to try one of Spencer's. I shall go and fetch one out of his room, Sydney. Will you come and help me?"

"Oh! no—let us wait till he comes. I think he won't like us to go and meddle with his things," said Sydney, drawing back.

"Why, you silly, little coward, do you mean to say, you dare not take Spencer's cigars? What would he do to you now, if he caught you stealing one?"

"Oh! I don't know. I never tried—I can't smoke. I don't even know where he keeps his cigars."

"I'll tell you what—it seems to me that

this cousin of mine, is a regular Bluebeard. You poor little mouse ! you are dreadfully afraid of him, ain't you ? The idea of any body being afraid of Spencer. It's a capital joke, upon my word ! Augusta, this thing is frightened to death to take a cigar out of her husband's room. Did you ever hear anything so absurd ?”

“I am not much surprised, I must confess,” replied Mrs. Dawkins. “Spencer is a very different person when with you and your sister, to what he is with other people. I should not call Spencer's temper a comfortable one to live with, I confess. I know you both think it is, because he has always been a perfect slave to all your little whims and fancies ; but I don't know that I should have said Spencer would be an easy husband to please. You don't find him so, I daresay, my dear Mrs. Hamilton, if the truth were

known," added Mrs. Dawkins, suddenly turning to Sydney.

"I found him most amiable, most easy to please. He was everything that was kind and indulgent, all the time we were at Midsummer Verney," answered Sydney, evasively.

"Ah! I can understand that—there was no counter-influence at work there," said Mrs. Dawkins to herself, as if unconsciously. "But, my dear, I forget who I am talking to—I must not say a word against Spencer to Spencer's wife, of course;—but I, for one, have no very high opinion of conjugal bliss. I have no reason to speak favourably of the holy estate of matrimony," continued this exemplary woman, who had passed many years of her married life, in making an honest man's life, a burden to him. "You may always rely upon my sym-

pathy. Come to me in all your little matrimonial troubles and difficulties, my dear. I always take the woman's part on these occasions, and I invariably believe the man to be a brute, even before I have heard a single particular of the case in dispute."

"But I am sure Spencer is not a brute," exclaimed Sydney indignantly, "and I don't know that we have had any dispute—only about one thing, at least."

"I see! Via forbade you to ask Mrs. Broke to dinner, and yet you had the courage to do so. You would not desert your old friend to please your husband's cousin, and so—and so—your husband is angry with you! Don't speak now—I saw it all and heard it all, and understand it all, perfectly. Poor child! poor, innocent, unsuspecting child! Well! well!—it is only the way of the world! You are not worse off than half the

women I know, after all. Only take my advice, dear. If you want to please your husband and retain (I won't say his affection, for perhaps that would be a mockery), but his kindness; his forbearance; his approbation, in short; always make it a point to do whatever Lady Venetia tells you—that's all. It is a simple rule—is it not? and easy enough to follow, if you will but bear in mind that in pleasing her, lies your only chance of pleasing him. But here come the gentleman, already, I declare."

"Spencer, I want a cigarette," cried Lady Die, running to meet her cousin. "Your excellent wife would not let me go and steal one for myself."

"And quite right too," said Spencer, "I wish you would give up that horrid practice, Die."

"Will nobody take pity upon me, when

you all know, I can't exist without a cigarette after dinner?" said Lady Diana. "I am ordered it by my doctor."

"May I have the pleasure of giving you one, Lady Diana," said Lord Templecombe. The offer was accepted with a sweet smile, and the young man was made happy for the evening.

"Well!" said Spencer Hamilton, joining Lady Venetia, and leading her into a side avenue, a covered walk of thick hornbeam, where they were out of sight and hearing; "I believe we have got rid of that fellow at last, more easily than I had bargained for. Die's bright smile and sparkling eyes left him an easy prey to Beaumont and myself, after you were gone. Poor fellow! Parliament is not much in his line, and he would never have done any good there—if he had got in. It was all old Cleveden's doing.

Tempey himself, is only too happy to get off. I believe it is to be announced publicly at the meeting to-morrow ; in the meantime, he is amply rewarded by seeing Die smoke one of his cigarettes."

"It was too absurd, his thinking of standing at all," said Lady Venetia. "He has no talent whatever for that sort of thing. So different from you, Spencer. I almost wonder, now you are able to afford it, that *you* don't try a parliamentary life. You would be so certain to make a name there, and would get into office in no time. Shall I speak to Sir Robert about it?"

"No! thank you, Via! I would rather you did not. I am very well satisfied as I am."

"I hope you are happy, Spencer," asked Lady Venetia anxiously. "I feel in a sort of way, responsible, you know, for your

happiness, having so strongly advised your marrying that dear child, Sydney. I am sure it is impossible to help liking her. She is so thoroughly amiable and good."

"Oh! yes! she is *good* enough in all conscience," said Spencer. "I have only one fault to find with my wife, and that is that she is not *you*, Via. I am afraid, however, it is an irreparable fault, and poor Sydney can't help it, any how."

"Now, Spencer, this is very wrong! You know we settled that when once you were married, we were never to refer to the past. But, I do hope and trust, you will, in time, learn to like poor little Sydney. She has just the least, tiny tendency to be jealous, I fancy, of me, and if she really were to suspect that you had ever cared for me, it might make things very uncomfortable for us all. Her mother, I hear, plagues

poor James Lambert's heart out, with her jealousies, and Sydney has quite a look of her mother, now and then."

"I would advise her not to try to torment *me* in that way," exclaimed Spencer angrily. "I should soon put a stop to it, I can tell her. I have no notion of standing that sort of thing, from a wife one does not care particularly about. I think Sydney knows me better than to take up that line. If not, she will very soon find it out."

"Oh! dear! dear! What a tiresome impetuous creature you are! You quite frighten me. I meant nothing of that sort; only you know, they do say (it is too absurd to repeat really), but they tell me, poor James Lambert had to take his wife abroad, because she was so jealous of his speaking to me. It's so excessively ridiculous that it makes me die of laughing whenever I think

of it. But if that is a family failing, perhaps you ought to be a little on your guard. Don't you think so, yourself? I am only warning you to be careful, for the sake of your own happiness, and Sydney's, and—*mine!*" added Lady Venetia, emphatically, as if this last consideration were the only really important one of the three.

"Thanks, dearest Via! I will bear in mind what you say, and if I should detect the slightest symptom of any such tendency on Sydney's part, believe me, I shall know how to put a stop to it at once."

"Well! but don't be cross to the poor little thing; because if you are, I shall hate you, Spencer, and what is more, I shall hate myself—for I shall feel it was all my fault for persuading you to marry her. Now, pray be gentle with her, if you don't wish to make me a prey to remorse. No! we

won't take another turn now. We have been here alone, quite long enough, to scandalize the good people of Dumbleton. Think of all Augusta Dawkins must be saying about us, at this moment. Go and talk to somebody else now, and don't speak to me again, the whole evening. Promise me this ;" and having allowed Spencer to kiss her white hand, just as a pledge of his obedience to her high behest, Lady Venetia issued forth alone, from an opening in the hornbeam hedge, feeling much elated with the deep sense she entertained of her own extreme prudence and discretion ; and not a little triumphant also, to find that she had not yet lost all power over the heart of the unfortunate young man, whose life she had in a great measure, sacrificed to her own selfish vanity.

Spencer shortly afterwards appeared on

the lawn, from a walk on the opposite side of the garden ; and these foolish people, like two ostriches hiding their heads in a bush, flattered themselves that nobody (especially Mrs. Bowyer Dawkins) would suspect them of having walked up and down the horn-beam avenue together, for the last half hour, in close conversation. Mrs. Dawkins meantime had not forgotten to "improve the opportunity" by having a little conversation with Sydney. This female Mephistophiles loved to make mischief for her own private amusement. She was—

" O'er quick
To catch a lothly plume, fall'n from the wing
Of that foul bird of rapine, whose whole prey
Is man's good name."

Besides, being unhappy and discontented herself, she hated to see other people happy and contented, and above all, she had her

own private reasons for wishing to destroy Lady Venetia Verney's domestic felicity— (or, perhaps domestic prosperity would be the right expression to use, in this case.) In fact, Lady Venetia had married a man whom Mrs. Bowyer Dawkins had marked for her own. Sir Robert had, in bygone years, flirted a little in a stately, dignified manner with Mrs. Dawkins, who at one period of her life, had certainly had some attractions to boast of. But Sir Robert, poisoned no doubt, by the base insinuations of his wife, had since his marriage, evinced no disposition whatever to cultivate the society of Mrs. Bowyer Dawkins; and what was more, he had joined with Lady Venetia in trying to persuade Lady Diana Hartland to give up her friend, and to leave Augusta to her fate. "Revenge is sweet," and Mrs. Dawkins could think of no more easy and

convenient manner of revenging herself upon Lady Venetia, than by working upon the feelings of poor, jealous, Sydney. Mrs. Dawkins hoped to bring matters to a crisis between Lady Venetia and Spencer Hamilton, and thus create a scandal which would ultimately arouse the attention of that sleeping lion, Sir Robert, and induce him to shake his mane, and roar, and even perhaps to crush some of Augusta's enemies with one stroke of his mighty paw. Mrs. Bowyer Dawkins therefore, looked forward with pleasure to the prospect of a light and amusing occupation for the remainder of her sojourn on Dumbleton Common, and (as she confessed to herself) she saw her way to despatching several little birds who had annoyed her, with the same stone.

This was a kind of sport in which Mrs. Bowyer Dawkins took great delight, and

for which she was not only eminently fitted by nature, but well skilled by constant practice.

"You have a charming neighbour in Lady Venetia," began the wily woman, as she slipped her arm through Sydney's, and led her to a seat under one of the grand, old trees on the lawn.

"She is very agreeable," said Sydney with a sigh.

"Oh! nobody so agreeable as Via—a very popular woman—everybody likes her—it's impossible to help it, is not it?"

This time Sydney's reply was inaudible; but Mrs. Dawkins proceeded—

"It's such a pity, poor thing, she is not more happily married. If Via had been married to the man she loved, I do believe she would have been a very different person. Poor, dear Via! I can't help suspecting that

she really had a heart, once upon a time ! but she made a fatal mistake in marrying a man so many years older than herself, and for whom, she never cared twopence."

" Yet, I should have thought any woman might have been happy with Sir Robert," said Sydney. " He seems so kind and attentive to her, and he is so good, and so clever. I could fancy Sir Robert's wife might have been very proud' of him."

" Ah ! some wives might have been ; but Venetia is not a woman to take a pride in her husband. She requires to be the first object with everyone. Now she is not Sir Robert's first object. His whole soul is absorbed in his work. He cares for very little else, in comparison. He is, as you observe, very kind and attentive to his wife ; but his wife is quite a secondary consideration with him. That does not suit

Via, and so she tries to become the first consideration with — with — other people,” added Mrs. Bowyer Dawkins hesitating, and stopping short awkwardly, as Sydney thought, but in fact, very skilfully.

“I often think, it must have been rather a blow to poor Venetia,” continued Mrs. Dawkins, “when Spencer married—though she told us it was all her doing, and that she made up the match herself; but I never could quite believe that.”

“But why should it matter to Lady Venetia,” asked Sydney, “who Spencer married, or whether he was married at all? She has her own husband, and I don’t see what difference it could make to her.”

“Why, my dear child, don’t you know? but of course you do—married people never have any secrets from each other, do they? so I need scarcely remind you of Venetia’s

former attachment to her cousin. You know all about it, I have no doubt."

"Yes. Spencer told me that Lady Venetia and Lady Diana had always been just like sisters to him," said Sydney.

"Sisters! Eh? Something more than sisters I should have said," insinuated the artful woman. "He may have looked upon Die as a sister perhaps; but Via is a very different story. But you need not be cautious and reserved with me, dear child. Remember, I have known them all my life, and all the ins and outs of the whole story. Poor Via! it was a sad business. I do believe Spencer is the only human being she ever really liked better than herself."

"But, indeed, Mrs. Dawkins, I don't understand, the least in the world. Lady Venetia is married now, and so is Spencer, so what does it matter? I suppose you

mean that they were once in love with each other ; but that is all over, long ago."

"Do you think so? Well! you ought to know. It strikes me that they flirt quite as much as ever, and rather more openly ; but to be sure, you know best. If you are satisfied, it is nothing to me ! After having been engaged to each other for three, or four years, quite clandestinely, one has no very great faith in their candour. I shall never forget what a terrible scene old Lord Osterley made about it, when he found it out."

"I know his father died when he was a little boy, and left him quite dependent upon his uncle," said Sydney eagerly ; "and then he went to live with Lord Osterley, and was brought up quite like one of his own children."

"Yes! and then showed his gratitude by persuading Via to elope with him. Just at

the last moment, the plot was fortunately discovered, and the whole thing was hushed up; but the fact was, they had been engaged for three years, and had carried on a long correspondence, and in short, nothing could have been more foolish than Venetia's conduct, or more reckless than Spencer's. However, from the moment he found out what had been going on, old Osterley forbade him the house, and they never met again till Via was married to Sir Robert Verney. I often wonder Sir Robert allowed Spencer to be for ever with Via after she married; but it was no affair of mine. But you knew all this before, my dear Mrs. Hamilton, of course? I need not ask such a question."

"Most of it," answered Sydney, determining to make the best of the matter. "Spencer did not enter into particulars, but he gave me the outline of the story."

“And you still think it wise to let him be so much with Lady Venetia? You are a bold, little woman, Sydney. (You must let me call you Sydney. I always call him Spencer, you know). Now I am going to be very candid, my dear Sydney. You are a very pretty, attractive creature, but you are no match for Venetia Verney. There’s not a woman in England who has more power of fascination than Via, when she chooses to exert it—and I know her well enough to see that she has by no means relinquished her hold upon Spencer Hamilton yet. The man is perfectly infatuated with her still. There seems to me to be very little attempt at concealment. Now I am a woman of the world, my dear Sydney, and you may take my word for it, that you are not wise in remaining so near that dangerous, and not very high-principled woman.

Some of these days, when it is too late, you will be sorry you did not take my friendly advice. Ah ! I know the routine of these sort of things, only too well. Be guided by me, my child. I can have no motive, you know, in making mischief. What difference can it possibly make to me, one way, or the other ; but you are a sweet, innocent, guileless darling—and I cannot help longing to be your friend. If I had had a friend when I first married, who would have taken the same kind of motherly interest in me, my life might have been a happy one. Your mother, my dear, is abroad, I hear, or I should not have taken the liberty of speaking to you so frankly. You will forgive me, won't you ? But it is getting late, and they are going, I declare. Good night, my child ! You have a difficult task before you ; but I cannot help thinking you will

triumph at last. Your youth and innocence will some day win Spencer's heart, depend upon it. Remember in the meantime that you have a true friend in me."

Sydney thanked her "true friend" cordially, and went to "speed her parting guests" with a heavy heart.

CHAPTER II.

A PUBLIC MEETING.

*"Cato—Meanwhile we'll sacrifice to Liberty.
Remember, O my friends! the laws, the rights,
The generous plan of power delivered down
From age to age, by your renowned forefathers,
(So dearly bought, the price of so much blood ;)
Oh, let it never perish in your hands!
But piously transmit it to your children ;
Do thou, great Liberty, inspire our souls,
And make our lives, in thy possession, happy,
Or our deaths glorious in thy just defence."*

ADDISON.

As it was a fine moonlight night, the ladies chose to walk home, and Lord Templecombe, John Beaumont, and Spencer Hamilton accompanied them.

Sydney was soon left alone with the somewhat painful reflections, which had been suggested to her mind, by Mrs. Bowyer Dawkins.

“ Oh ! what shall I do ! what can I do ! ” she cried, as she sank into a low chair near the open window in her dressing-room. “ This is dreadful !—almost too dreadful to bear. *If* it is true ? ” she added, as a ray of hope darted across her mind ; “ but I don’t know that it is true, after all. They all dislike this Mrs. Bowyer Dawkins. She may really not know anything about the matter. No, I will not act hastily ; I will be calm, and wait, and consider, and be very, very careful ; much more cautious and thoughtful than I have ever been before, in the whole course of my life. I will not throw away all my happiness on the spur of the moment. Mrs. Dawkins meant kindly, I am sure, poor

woman ; but she has been unhappy herself, and I dare say, she suspects people on rather doubtful evidence. She was very kind to me, I must own that ; but she may have heard things that were not quite true about—*them*, or she may even have fancied things that are totally without foundation. I will not give up Spencer without hearing the truth from his own lips ; but if—if—oh !” she gasped, suddenly breaking down and bursting into tears, “ if he really does like *her* best, I must go—I must get away—far, far away, out of their sight somewhere ; I cannot—cannot live here and watch them day after day. Yet, I must be cautious, and find out the real truth before I take any further steps ; but not to-night—I could not go through any more to-night, I have been so very miserable already this evening. I will wait till this election business is settled,

I think; Spencer has so much to do just now. I will put it off, till after that, and *then*—ah! then! then! then!—What will happen to me then, I wonder? I must know the worst—I cannot bear this terrible suspense; it will drive me mad, I am afraid, if it lasts much longer. But, ah! here he comes! how gay and happy he seems; he can whistle to himself as he walks along; he is happy, whilst I—it *must* be nonsense—I will not believe it; I am a jealous, foolish wretch, to believe every idle report I hear. It is not true—it shall not be true. I will go to bed and go to sleep, and in the morning I shall laugh, to think how foolish I have been. Spencer must not come in and find me crying. Why,” she said, laughing hysterically, as she looked at her tear-stained, swollen face in the glass, “what a horrible figure I have made of myself, and

all for nothing! — for nothing at all! Ha! ha! ha! How absurd it is! Aunt Patty will be quite amused when I tell her what a fool I have been!"

Perhaps it was fortunate for once, that Mr. Hamilton's work kept him employed in his study till nearly three o'clock in the morning, and by that time poor Sydney had fallen into one of those heavy, dreamless sleeps which often follow any violent emotion, and she awoke late the next morning, with so bad a head-ache that she had a very good excuse for not coming down to breakfast. When she did leave her room, Spencer had gone to town, so that no uncomfortable conversation ensued between them that day.

In the evening, a great public meeting of Sir Robert's supporters was to be held in the Town Hall, and a place had been especially reserved for the ladies in the gallery

usually appropriated to the orchestra on festive occasions. Of course, we all determined to go, and Tom kindly took me in early, and found for me a quiet seat in a dark corner in the background. Lady Venetia and her party arrived shortly afterwards, all dressed in blue, or blue and white ; and her ladyship looked, I thought, particularly handsome and animated, as she bowed gracefully in acknowledgment of the acclamations which greeted her entrance. Sydney came and sat in the dark by me, and complained still of her head, and said, she was afraid of the flare of the gas lights. Miss Verney looked very well in her blue bonnet and mantle, and went at once to a seat by Margaret Beaumont, who appeared to be only too glad to make room for her. We, who had been behind the scenes a little, were aware that Lord Templecombe's retirement

was to be announced at the close of the evening, but this fact was not yet known to the general public. His Lordship and the Vicar came up into our gallery, where as they said, they could "see and not be seen;" and I cannot say their spirits suffered much in consequence of their defeat, for they both talked a vast deal of nonsense, and seemed to be mightily amused at everything that occurred, however trivial.

Mrs. Broke had invited us all to drink tea at the Vicarage, and though Selina had assured us that we should be half-starved, as she had nothing in the house but the "co-operative" tea and sugar and a loaf of bread, we agreed to go, nevertheless, and take our chance; though I must confess that I for one, had taken the precaution to order a good, substantial supper to be ready for Tom when we got home, for I had no idea

of letting him suffer, poor fellow ! from exhaustion, after his hard day's work. He, with Mr. Hamilton, John Beaumont, and many other of the leading men of Dumbleton, were on the platform, and by eight o'clock the large hall was more than crowded. The Liberal party had flocked in, to do honour to their candidate, and were evidently in a state of enthusiastic delight at the prospect of carrying all before them.

John Beaumont—as chairman of Sir Robert's committee, having been requested to preside—opened the proceedings by expressing his feelings of pride and gratification at seeing the hall so well filled with a respectable and influential assemblage. He begged to remind them of the immense advantages which Dumbleton had for many years derived from being represented in Parliament by a man of such undoubted reputation as

Sir Robert Verney ; and he recounted in very forcible language, the numerous merits of that gentleman, and the many valuable services which he had rendered, not only to Dumbleton, but to the country at large.

Sir Robert next rose, and assured us of his unswerving fidelity to the interests of Dumbleton, and his sincere attachment to that Borough. He strongly advised his constituents not to allow a stranger and a Conservative to take his place, for though personally, he had the highest possible esteem for his noble friend Lord Templecombe, he was unable to believe that he could have the interests of Dumbleton so much at heart, as an old and tried friend like himself ; and he must acknowledge that he should be sorry to see the Borough represented by one in the Conservative interest. Sir Robert then went on to expound

his own sentiments upon the principal questions of the day, and ended, of course, by declaring his anxiety for a new Reform Bill, and his desire to see a very considerable extension of the franchise, so that more of the people of England might be entrusted with the power of voting, of which power Sir Robert felt convinced they would make a most temperate and judicious use.

This speech was received with rapturous applause, the cheers, as the "Dumbleton Mercury" truly observed, interrupting the proceedings for several consecutive minutes.

Tom next made a short, but telling speech, and several other gentlemen followed him—all upholding Sir Robert in the most flattering terms, and mentioning his rival in a manner that must have been proportionately mortifying to that nobleman. At length our attention was requested by the chairman

on behalf of Mr. Redfern, a working man, who was anxious to address the meeting. George Redfern then stepped forward, and in a slow, deliberate manner, as if carefully weighing every word he uttered, began as follows :—

“ Gentlemen,—My fellow workmen have sent me here to-night, to ask you to give your votes to our old friend, Sir Robert Verney, who has hitherto done his duty by us like a man, and who has always been the advocate of true, liberal principles. We don’t want to have any Tories in Dumbleton; we are very well satisfied with our present member. What we working men want, is to have our interests represented in Parliament, and we believe, that if the question should arise of extending the franchise to the working classes, Sir Robert will speak up for us, and do all he can to serve

us. If we did not believe this, we would have nothing more to say to him. For my own part, I see no danger in giving honest and well-conducted working men a vote; for I am sure they would, in the main, vote in accordance with their convictions, and they would vote, (as I mean to do) for a gentleman of education, in preference to a man of their own class. What would be the use of our sending uneducated men to represent us, or our interests? No! we must have men of education and natural ability, who will be able to fight our battles, and defend our rights. I believe some people dread our numbers. They believe we shall all vote the same way—for our own exclusive interests. But that is mere moonshine, because in order to do that, we should have to be all of one mind, and keep at the same dead level in intelligence, and

thought, and feeling; which is simply impossible.

“ We know, (uneducated as we are !) that no permanent good can ever come of one-sidedness on our part, any more than good can come of one-sidedness on the part of any other class. But we look upon those men as cowards, who are either too selfish, or too timid to give us the same privilege which they claim for themselves. Why don't your class meet us like men, and where we are too ignorant, point it out to us ? Surely the more ignorant we are, the more easy it will be for you to confute us, and the greater will be your power to set us right. We know that the higher class contains many good people, who are the safety valves of their order, and all good working men honour them, and would vote with them for the common good of all. The right-

mindcd people of all classes should work together against the selfish of all classes. It makes no difference which class we belong to ; the thing is, are we willing to act fairly and honestly one towards the other? Now suppose the best of you upper class people should have faith in the best of my class and help us to obtain the franchise, what will be the result? Why the best of the working men will feel in duty bound, to honour, and respect, and stand by those who have shown themselves to be their friends.

“ We have our aristocracy, as well as you have. We have our Conservatives, just as you have. We have both true and false among us, as you have. We have those who live entirely for themselves, and we have those who wish to conserve all that is good and useful in society. We desire only to extend the franchise to those who prove

by their conduct that they are fit for it, so that they may be able to do their duty as free men—free from the tyranny of others, and free from the tyranny of themselves. The real working men do not wish the greedy and selfish of their own class, to have any power in the House of Commons, because they would only do harm there; just as the greedy, selfish men among the higher classes do harm there, at present. But what we do want, is to have a fair number of representatives, who are free from class prejudice and class pride, and who are generous enough to ask for fair play for us, as well as for themselves.

“Well! Is there anything unreasonable in this? Are you still determined to drive us from you, and to widen the gap between us? Do you really hate and despise us, because we are obliged to work from

morning till night, from childhood to old age, in order to obtain bread for ourselves, and for our children? Does this make us unfit to be trusted with power enough to protect our own interests, and to take our own part in the battle of life? If so, we must just fight it out, and may God defend the right. Sir Robert Verney will be the man to help us."

Having thus come to this rather abrupt conclusion, George Redfern hastily disappeared from the platform, and took refuge amidst a crowd of eager friends from the storm of plaudits that ensued.

Almost directly afterwards, a note was handed to the chairman, which contained the important news that Lord Templecombe, finding that very little sympathy existed in Dumbleton for the Conservative interest, thought it better at once, to retire from the

field. He felt he had no chance of success against so formidable an adversary as his honoured and respected friend, Sir Robert Verney; and he therefore took the earliest opportunity of announcing publicly that it was no longer his intention to go to the poll. Lord Templecombe concluded by offering his sincere congratulations to the electors of the ancient borough of Dumbleton, on being able to secure the services of their old favorite, Sir Robert Verney.

This announcement, (which was, as I afterwards learnt, written by our Vicar) was received with shouts of triumph by the assembled multitude, and the "loud and vociferous cheering" that ensued, was perfectly deafening. I had indeed at one time quite an alarm that the drum of my ear might be seriously injured.

So ended this futile project of introducing a Conservative candidate into Dumbleton in opposition to our beloved and respected representative, Sir Robert Verney.

CHAPTER III.

SUPPER AT THE VICARAGE.

“ ‘ What have we got here ? Why this is good eating
Your own, I suppose, or is it in waiting ?’
‘ Why whose should it be ?’ cried I with a flounce,
‘ I get these things often.’ But that was a bounce.
Some Lords, my acquaintance, that settle the nation,
Are pleased to be kind—but I hate ostentation.”

GOLDSMITH.

WHEN the proceedings were over, and the crowd had dispersed, Mr. Broke begged us all to go at once, to his house, and see what we could get to eat and drink.

Lady Venetia laughed good humouredly,

and owned she was very thirsty, and should be very thankful for a cup of co-operative tea. Then turning round and seeing me, her Ladyship very kindly said, she hoped I would join her party. Dear little Sydney would be much happier, she felt sure, if I were with her. "She is such a darling, is not she?" added Lady Venetia, stroking my niece's cheek caressingly; "but she never looks quite happy unless she has some of her old friends about her—do you, pet?—and Aunt Patty is one of your great favorites, I know."

I felt, of course, quite flattered at this speech, and readily consented to go to the Vicarage, in Lady Venetia's carriage. We were among the first arrivals, but had not been long in the drawing-room before Lord Templecombe entered, accompanied by George Redfern, who evidently had only

been induced to come in, under strong protest.

"Here's this fellow Greenleaf," said Lord Templecombe. "I made him come in to tea. I believe, by the bye, his name is not Greenleaf, at all—but never mind that. 'What's in a name?'—you know—and all that sort of thing. If Greenleaf objects, I am very sorry, but the fact is, that when I once get a name into my head, I can't get it out again, and I've got it into my head that his name is Greenleaf. Lady Venetia, allow me to present to you Mr. Greenleaf."

"I am very glad to see you, sir," said Lady Venetia, holding out her neatly-gloved hand, but wincing a little, in spite of all her presence of mind, at the powerful grip which the honest mechanic gave it. "We are very much obliged to you, I am sure, for your

excellent speech, and I am told you are quite one of the best friends we have in Dumbleton. Sir Robert will be delighted to make your acquaintance."

"How do you do, Mr. Redfern," said Sir Robert, (who never forgot a name), as he came forward and shook Redfern's hand heartily. "You are quite an orator, I am happy to find. I believe you have gained the day for us. I am glad to see you here."

"There! I knew everybody would be glad to see you, Greenleaf. Did not I tell you so, now? I am sure it is a most delightful little party: quite an amalgamated, associated, united, amicable, friendly meeting of 'social bees,' all sitting 'hand-in-hand' round the British tea-table. Eh?—Is not that just your opinion of it, Greenleaf?—But, here's my man Sherrard, announcing supper.

Let us all go and have some. Now Berresford, will you take Lady Venetia in to the dining-room."

"This blacksmith man, will eat the whole of my one loaf, and demolish what's left of the leg of mutton," whispered Mrs. Broke to Sydney, as she passed, leaning on Sir Robert's arm.

Margaret, who knew Redfern well, went up to him and asked him to sit by her, thinking he would feel more comfortable near an old friend.

Lord Templecombe took possession of Lady Diana, and John Beaumont offered his arm to Miss Verney. Mrs. Dawkins was nearly forgotten in the fray, but she said, in a rather ill-used voice to Mr. Hamilton, who was talking very kindly to me,—

"Spencer, where are you? They are all going in to the next room. Do you mean

to leave me here alone, all the evening?"

"Not unless you particularly wish it, Mrs. Dawkins; but I don't suppose we can get into the dining-room, even if we try."

"Oh, yes! *we* can — you and I. We shall be able to find room in some corner. Perhaps the rest, can wait a little longer."

"Come in—come in! There's lots of room for everybody," called out the Vicar, from the doorway. "Miss Patty, let me help you. We will find you a comfortable place in a minute. Sydney, my wife has kept a seat for you, next her own."

I was quite surprised when I went in to the dining-room, to find, instead of the one loaf and the cold leg of mutton, which Mrs. Broke had led us to expect, a most perfect

petit souper—cold chickens, tongue, ham, sandwiches, lobster-salad, plovers' eggs, jelly, and every luxury of the season. Tea and coffee were to be had at a side-table, but champagne and claret-cup appeared to be the beverages most in request. The whole thing was beautifully arranged, and the oddest part of it was, that nobody seemed more surprised to see it there, than Mrs. Broke, herself.

“Why, the fact of the matter is, my dear Selina,” said Lord Templecombe, in reply to her exclamations of delight, “I have the highest possible opinion of you in every capacity but one, and that is, as a good housekeeper; so I gave my man orders to talk the matter over with Mrs. Peacock, and to try what they could do for us; and between them, I think they have managed it very neatly—eh? Sherrard and Peacock

are a capital pair of people on an emergency of this sort."

"I presume, you mean Mrs. Phillpotts, Tempey," said the Vicar. "The name of the woman is Phillpotts, and the name of her house is 'the Peacock.'"

"Oh! ah! that's it, is it? Well, my dear boy, I dare say, you are right, and I am wrong; but do you know, I am afraid, I always reverse the order of things. I call the house 'the Phillpotts,' and the woman Mrs. Peacock. She rather likes it best, she tells me. Greenleaf, my worthy friend, have you got anything to eat? I beg you will take care of yourself. Pray remember that 'we could better spare, a better man.' Have a glass of wine with me, Greenleaf? Sherrard, a glass of champagne to the gentleman opposite."

"I should like to ask you one question,

Miss Beaumont, if it's not taking a liberty," said George Redfern, in a low voice to Margaret, shortly afterwards. "Pray, do you consider my Lord more of a knave than a fool, or more of a fool than a knave? for I can't make him out at all."

"Ah! my good fellow, you may well ask," said Lord Templecombe, who happened to overhear the question; "but I am afraid that's more than I can tell you, or any of my friends either. It's one of those problems which never can be solved—like the philosopher's stone, and squaring the circle, and perpetual motion, and so forth. However, it don't much matter, that's one good thing. It makes very little difference to anybody which I am — does it, Lady Die?"

"Very little, indeed, as far as I am concerned," replied that lady, carelessly.

"I trust the House of Commons will be able to sustain with becoming fortitude, the loss of your Lordship's witty speeches," sneered Mrs. Dawkins.

"I trust so, too," answered Lord Templecombe, good-humouredly. "We all feel that it must have been a blow to the Conservative party; but we will hope they may meet it with Christian resignation. After all, I doubt if I could long have stood the wear and tear it would have entailed upon my constitution. They tell me the House is a confoundedly unwholesome kind of place. Your brains are roasted by the gas in the roof, while your feet are frozen by the ventilators in the floor. Your olfactory nerves suffer from the odours from the river, and your digestion is ruined by the irregular hours. You never know when you can have your dinner, or if you'll get any

dinner at all. Then, you are expected to sit half the night, quietly listening to all the old bores who choose to get up and make a speech at you, and you don't know which way to vote, when all's done. My father told me the House of Commons was the best club in London, but I am quite satisfied with Whites' and the Carlton, and the Travellers', and I ask for nothing more, I am much obliged to you."

"An evident case of sour grapes," murmured Mrs. Dawkins, audibly.

"Thank you, my dear Madam. I know, I may always safely rely upon your heartfelt sympathy, whenever I require it," gently replied the imperturbable young nobleman.

"Here are some grapes, which may perhaps be less acid. They came from Clevedon, this morning. Let me give you some."

"Shall we go back to the drawing-room, Mrs. Broke?" said Lady Venetia, who loved peace and harmony. "We shall give the gentlemen more room to finish their supper comfortably."

"Well, I must say, it was very lucky Tempey thought of sending in all these good things," exclaimed Selina, as soon as we got into the next room. "Upon my word, I don't know what would have become of me, if he had not done something of the kind. You don't know what it is to be poor, Lady Venetia. I am sure, I had no idea till I married what a very disagreeable thing it was; not that I mean to say I regret it, of course; I am sure I am as happy with Berresford as the day is long, but still it *is* rather trying now and then, you must own, never to feel sure what you are likely to have, to eat. It's just a chance if there's

anything for dinner sometimes, I can assure you; and I can't help thinking we must have the most horrible servants in the world; they cheat us to any extent, and tell the most barefaced falsehoods; indeed, I am quite obliged to laugh sometimes, it is so ridiculous."

"Dear me! but it must be rather unpleasant too," observed Lady Venetia, looking shocked at such a revelation of abject poverty.

"Oh, yes, of course it is, very; but one gets used to this sort of thing in time," sighed Selina. "I never expected to have fallen so low when first I came out; but Berresford was so good-looking and so gentleman-like, and altogether I could not make up my mind to refuse him. Papa and mamma warned me what it would come to, but I did not believe a word they said.

One never does, you know, on those occasions; and so here we are in a state of perfect destitution. However, mamma is coming to stay with me soon. I get so low left here all alone when Berresford is in the parish, and I told mamma she really must come and cheer me up. I require a good deal of amusement just now," added Selina, with a deprecating smile, "and so she has very kindly promised to come. And now Dumbleton is getting so gay, I shall ask her to bring Emily (my youngest sister) with her. Papa and the rest will go and pay visits, but Emmy kindly says, she will come here with mamma. I hope, Lady Venetia, you will be very good and ask her to your parties if you have any; and as for you, Sydney, you shall give a ball—I declare you shall. Ought not Sydney to give a ball, Lady Diana?"

"I don't see why, I own," said Lady Diana, shortly.

"Oh, don't you? Why, because she is so nice and rich, and just married, you know, and people always do give balls under these circumstances. I shall speak to Mr. Hamilton about it. How charming it must be to be rich! Sydney, dear, I can't say how I envy you: I look upon you as the very happiest little woman in all England at this moment. Mr. Hamilton is so distinguished-looking, and then you will go and live in that dear, blessed London, and dine out every night, and be in the very best set going. It is such an advantage for her to belong to your set, Lady Venetia, you can get Sydney asked everywhere. You will present her, I dare say, at the next drawing-room. Oh, dear me! I don't suppose I shall ever go to another drawing-

room. Now, Sydney, do listen, and don't look so absent and melancholy, for goodness sake! I have no patience with you. Do you hear how much I am envying you, all this time?"

"You need not give yourself that trouble, Selina," replied Sydney, with a sigh, as she stepped out through the open window on to the little grass plat, which was dignified by the appellation of the lawn.

"Ah, poor Sydney!" said Selina, "how desperately in love she is still, it's quite amusing. You see she is perfectly miserable when Spencer is out of her sight for five minutes. When she has been married as long as I have, she will feel that it is quite a relief to get rid of him sometimes, I dare say."

"Greenleaf has gone," announced Lord Templecombe, suddenly putting his head in

at the window; "I could not persuade him to stay another minute, 'His missis would be looking after him,' he said. Happy Greenleaf! how I wish I had a 'missis' to look after me!" added his Lordship, in a low voice to Lady Diana, who was standing near me. "Have you seen the garden, Lady Die? Berresford has a charming garden: magnificent roses and splendid carnations. Come and look at them. It is not dark; there is such an awfully jolly moon."

"I hate a garden," said Lady Diana, pouting and shrugging her shoulders; "and nothing bores me half so much as the moon."

Nevertheless, she went out with Lord Templecombe, and I suspect they found themselves slightly *de trop*, for Sydney was sitting in an arbour in close conversation with her new friend, Mrs. Bowyer Dawkins; and

on a seat at the other end of the garden sat Lady Venetia and Spencer Hamilton, talking over the election, of course, while Sir Robert, with his niece leaning on his arm, paced up and down the little grass plat, conversing eagerly on the same prolific subject with John Beaumont.

Tom and the Vicar were equally animated and friendly, and Margaret and I stayed in doors with poor Mrs. Broke, who was tired with her exertions, and was afraid to venture out.

It was quite late before the little party broke up, and we all agreed that the evening had been quite a success, and that if the poor dear Brokes had only been a little richer, we might have had some delightful croquet parties in the Vicarage garden.

CHAPTER IV.

MISS WOLFF'S LITTLE PAMPHLET.

"Yet wedlock's a very awful thing,
'Tis something like that feat in the ring,
Which requires nerve to do it ;
When one of a ' Grand Equestrian Troop,'
Makes a jump at a gilded hoop,
Not certain at all
Of what may befall
After his getting through it."

T. HOON.

THE grand question of the representation of Dumbleton having been thus amicably arranged by the contending powers, there remained little more to be done in the

matter, though, I fear, innumerable small feuds, bickerings, and heart-burnings were still left smouldering among the faithful adherents of either party. Mrs. Pybus and the Kibbles were of course triumphant, while Mr. Parkins was in a state of the deepest depression at the ignominious retreat of the Conservative candidate.

"It was a very proper lesson for Mr. Parkins," Mrs. Pybus told me one day. She considered her nephew's conduct in the whole affair had been decidedly presumptuous. Who was William Parkins that he should elect himself into so conspicuous a position? Mrs. Pybus had known William Parkins ever since he had been born, and she could not say she considered him by any means justified, in coming forward as he had done, setting the advice of Mr. Kibble at defiance, and insulting that

pious and heavenly-minded person, when compelled in the discharge of his duties to remonstrate with William Parkins. Mrs. Pybus had, (she owned, in all humility,) prayed that some judgment might overtake her nephew, as a warning to him that he was a sheep going astray, and she could not but regard Lord Templecombe's defeat as in some measure an answer to her request, but she feared William was still a backslider. He persisted in frequenting that mischievous and pestilential place of worship S. Monica's, and Mrs. Pybus could not help trembling for William Parkins's prospects for the future. If that poor, unfortunate girl Sophy, for instance, were to marry the misguided incumbent of S. Monica's himself, Mrs. Pybus owned she should not pity William Parkins the least. He had brought it upon himself, she considered,

and she feared she might yet live to see the day, when her great niece, Sophia Parkins, would go over to Rome, hand-in-hand with that wolf in sheep's clothing, Wilfred Auriol. At all events, such a catastrophe would certainly tend to bring poor William to his senses, and was, perhaps, therefore not wholly undesirable in Mrs. Pybus's opinion.

Mrs. Kibble was even still more irate. She thought it incumbent upon herself to cease calling at High Elms for a time, and sternly refused for herself and Mr. Kibble, all invitations to break bread under her brother's roof; and though this determination was a little like what the nurses would call "cutting off her nose to spite her face," Mrs. Kibble stood to her point womanfully, and forbade her husband to dine at High Elms during the whole of

her time of enforced seclusion, a prohibition which went to the heart of that excellent man ; for the grand and luxurious dinners at his brother-in-law's house, had ever been a source of great comfort and satisfaction to Nicholas Kibble, especially during such seasons as the present, when, his wife being confined to her own apartment, Mr. Kibble was left to the tender mercies of his cook, and suffered many little hardships and privations in consequence. It is true, that his wife's aunt, the respected Mrs. Pybus, had begged him to consider her house as his own, but Mr. Kibble knew better than to take such a liberty ; and indeed Aunt Pybus ordered him about so remorselessly, and found fault with his sermons so unceremoniously, that an evening spent *tête-à-tête* with that worthy woman was not usually one of pure and unalloyed satisfaction to her spiritual

pastor and master. The Parkins family suffered less under their deprivation of Mr. Kibble's company, than might have been expected.

Charles Parkins was apt to speak of his uncle in irreverent terms, as "Old Nick;" and Sophy, I am ashamed to say, encouraged her brother in this indiscretion; and Aunt Anna Maria Kibble was not more popular with the young people at High Elms, than her husband was. She often accused Sophy of extravagance in dress, and she thought Charles's manners open to objection. Arthur, she said, was a spoilt child, and not half so manly as her own little Matthew, of the same standing; and Rose, she pronounced to be both vain and pert, although inferior in every respect to her dear Kesiah, who was Rose's junior, by at least ten months.

The lamentation for the Kibbles was

therefore neither loud nor deep at High Elms, while it was totally impossible to make too much of the Auriol family.

Old Mrs. Auriol, (nothing loth) accepted without much grumbling the favours which were literally showered upon her in lavish profusion, by the generous hand of Mrs. Parkins. The great baskets of game, and poultry, and vegetables, and butter, and fruit, which erst were sent to the Kibbles' residence, at No. 1, Alma Terrace, now found their way into Mrs. Auriol's little larder ; and no party could now be reckoned complete at High Elms, without the presence of Wilfred Auriol and his sister Agnes. Agnes used to laugh, and tell me they were good-natured, well-meaning people, and she did not mind going there, very much. But Wilfred discovered that Mr. Parkins was an excellent, orthodox churchman, and gave

alms cheerfully and freely. The old lady owned, they might be a little vulgar perhaps, but that was a fault that might be improved by getting them into better society. Mrs. Parkins was a lady at heart, and that was all she required. As for Sophy, she had received a first-rate education, and had very good taste in church decorations, having actually gained a prize for a floral design at the Horticultural Gardens, at South Kensington.

She was also a beautiful needlewoman, and was now making Wilfred a lovely new alb of the finest lawn. In fact, Mrs. Auriol considered her a very praiseworthy young woman, and though of course it would be a shocking *mésalliance* for him, yet she should not feel justified in refusing her consent to a marriage between Wilfred and Sophy Parkins, if she found they were very much bent

upon it. Sophy had a very comfortable fortune, and Mrs. Auriol was sure, she could not imagine what was to become of poor Wilfred when she was taken from him, if he did not find a wife with a little money to look after him and take care of him, poor fellow ! She began to be afraid Agnes would really marry that tiresome Mr. Hatfield, who had nothing whatever of his own, and was totally without prospects ; and then Wilfred would be left alone in the world, and had no more notion of taking care of himself than the man in the moon.

The important day at length arrived, when Sir Robert Verney was returned without opposition as member for Dumbleton, amidst the enthusiastic applause of the whole population—electors and non-electors—and no one seemed more delighted at this happy termination than Lord Templecombe

himself, who was caught by Tom, in the act of shaking George Redfern heartily by the hand, and congratulating him on having won the day.

“Ah, you should have come to the poll, my Lord,” replied George; “it would have seemed so much more satisfaction to ourselves, if you would have fought it out, and let us beat you—not that it would have been difficult to do that; but it is rather poor kind of work to come in like this, without any struggle at all.”

“I am sorry for you, Greenleaf—upon my honour I am,” said Lord Templecombe; “but I could not help it, very well—the odds were so confoundedly against me, you see, or I should have been most happy to oblige you, I am sure.”

Lord Cleveden was, we heard, much more disappointed at the result of the election

than his son had been, but was partially consoled by the prospect of Lord Templecombe's proving more successful with the free and independent young widow, Lady Diana Hartland, than he had been with the free and independent electors of Dumbleton.

The day after the election, I was sitting with Sydney, when Miss Wolff was announced, much to our amazement, for Sapiaientia was not accustomed to waste her valuable time in paying morning visits.

"How do you do, Sydney?" she said in her most important voice. "I hope I see you well, Miss Martha Lambert. Pray is Mr. Hamilton at home?"

"Yes! he is in the library, I believe," said Sydney; "do you want him?"

"I wish to speak with him in private," replied Miss Wolff; "my business is of a strictly confidential nature."

"I will send and tell him you are here. I don't know if he is engaged at this moment," said Sydney, ringing the bell. Alas! poor child! the time was past in which she could have broken in upon her husband's engagements without ceremony.

"Just tell Mr. Hamilton," said Sydney to Fullinger, when he answered the bell, "that Miss Wolff is here, and desires to speak to him on some private business of importance."

"Thank you, my dear girl, I shall be really obliged to you, if you can obtain for me a little conversation with Mr. Hamilton. I have long wished for this opportunity."

Presently in came Spencer, himself, looking rather astonished. "You wish to speak to me, madam, I understand?"

"I do, sir,—and alone, if you please."

"I never receive ladies alone," replied Spen-

cer, gravely, with a glance of amusement at Sydney. "My character, Miss Wolff, is at stake, you will be pleased to remember. Allow my wife to remain in the room. Her aunt is also, a very discreet person, and I will answer for the secrecy of both ladies."

Sydney smiled, and looked pleased.

Miss Wolff bridled and simpered, and was perhaps rather flattered at the notion of being considered so dangerous a visitor, for she hesitated a few moments, fidgetted with her large, black leather bag, and ultimately consented to unfold her business in our presence—

"She had met with great difficulties and severe disappointments," she said, "in never having been permitted to see the member for Dumbleton. She really did not know how it had happened, but she had been most unfortunate in never finding Sir Robert at

home and disengaged. She had at length written to him and had been referred to his private secretary."

Spencer bowed.

"My object," continued Miss Wolff, "is I dare say, not unknown to you. I have here a pamphlet, which I have lately published, entitled, as you will see, 'The Non-existence of Married Women.'"

Miss Wolff here opened her bag, and produced several copies of the work in question, one of which she handed to each of us, with great solemnity.

"In casting your eye over this little publication, you will at once perceive that the object which I have at heart," said Miss Wolff, resuming her seat, "is nothing less than the improvement of the condition of married women. Allow me to point out to you the principal heads upon which

I intend to dwell more particularly. You will see, by referring to page 4, 'A wife cannot legally claim her own earnings.' If I were a married woman, the money I gain by my pen, could be taken from me by the law, and placed in the hands of my husband."

Here Miss Wolff looked up with horror depicted in her countenance, to watch the effect of her words. I was afraid Spencer would have choked with the effort he made to suppress his laughter at Sapiencia's cruel distress.

"Again," she continued, turning over the leaves of her pamphlet, "see page 6. 'A wife cannot make a will.' There is injustice for you! Miss Lambert, here, can make her will. I can make my will. Mrs. Spencer Hamilton cannot make her will! Why is this? Because she is a married woman!—

“ Again—page 7,—‘ A wife has no legal claim to her clothes and ornaments.’ Those rings and bracelets which my young friend Sydney wears, are not her own. Your husband, my dear, could claim them every one, if he chose!—

“ Then, may I call your attention to page 9. ‘ A married woman cannot prosecute for libel.’ What do you say to this, Mr. Hamilton? Am I to be libelled by everybody who has some petty spite against me, and am I not to protect myself?”

“ *You* are, I believe, at perfect liberty to prosecute, Miss Wolff,” replied Spencer, trying hard to keep his countenance.

“ Ah! I forgot—I beg your pardon—I am—but I take the cause of my poor sisters in bondage, so much to heart, that I sometimes almost forget my own identity.—

“ Let us pass to another clause—page 11,

'A married woman cannot sign a lease!' Shocking! Why is not Mrs. Duckett as well able to sign a lease as I am myself, I should be glad to know? But these are all trifles compared to what I am now coming to. You will see, at page 14, that 'A wife may not leave her husband's house.' Not only can he compel her to return to his roof, but he has a right to enter the house of any friend with whom she may take refuge, and call in the aid of the police to carry her away by force. Now, what do you say to this, Mrs. Spencer Hamilton?"

Poor Sydney shuddered and turned pale, and only asked piteously, "Is it true?"

"True? Yes—of course it is true. Do you suppose I should venture to publish statements which are not true? But I am not surprised to hear you ask the question, my dear girl—not the least surprised. But

listen to one more clause, if you please. Page 16, — ‘ The children of a married woman are, after a certain age, placed by law, at the sole disposal of her husband.’ That means, that a mother may be deprived of her children at the will of their wicked and tyrannical father !! I make no further comment on this clause. Now, Mr. Hamilton, I will leave you to think over all I have said, and I beg you will carefully take into consideration the immense importance of bringing a Bill before Parliament, in order to remedy this lamentable state of things, without further loss of time. I have here, sir, a petition signed by many hundreds of our British matrons, all praying for redress for their wrongs, and entreating to be delivered from their present state of slavery. You will, I trust, represent to Sir Robert Verney the urgency of the appeal, and do all in your

power to induce him to espouse our cause—(that is, I mean)—the cause of the wives and mothers of England.”

Mr. Hamilton promised to give the pamphlet and petition to Sir Robert, but could not take upon himself to give any decided opinion upon the matter; and with many civil speeches, at last handed Miss Wolff to the door, filled with the most sanguine hopes for the success of her mission.

“Oh, Spencer!” gasped Sydney, as soon as she was gone, “do tell me, is it all really true?”

“Yes, child, of course it is, and a very right and proper law it is. What would become of society?—what would become or the world at large, if there were not such laws as these, to keep things all fair and straight, I should like to know!”

“Oh! I don’t care about society or the

world at large, but it's dreadful! it's very dreadful to think of such things—it frightens me!"

"Why, what on earth can it matter to you, you little, foolish thing? I am not going to pawn all your jewels, am I?" said Spencer, laughing.

"I don't know, but I had no idea Miss Wolff was right; I thought she was only a silly, old woman, who talked nonsense."

"And you are a silly *young* woman, who talks great nonsense, so that's the difference between you. But I must go back to my work. Good-bye, Miss Lambert; you'll excuse me, I know."

Sydney only sighed, and looked very sad.

CHAPTER V.

“ THE FESTIVE SCENE.”

“There came an eve of festal hours,
Rich music filled that garden’s bowers ;
Lamps that from flowering branches hung,
On sparks of dew soft colours flung,
And bright forms glanced—a fairy show—
Under the blossoms to and fro.”

MRS. HEMANS.

LADY VENETIA determined to celebrate her husband’s victory by giving a grand evening entertainment at the Manor House, a *fête* of a description that had never before been witnessed in Dumbleton, and which, as Lord

Templecombe, (who seemed to have constituted himself master of the ceremonies, for the occasion) assured us, was to be conducted "on a scale of unexampled magnificence."

The gardens and shrubberies were to be illuminated with hundreds of coloured lamps, and dancing was to be carried on, to an immense extent, in a marquee of gigantic proportions, and supper was to be eaten all night long in another large tent; the gardens of Contango Abbey were also to be thrown open, so that a fine space was secured for the proceedings. A wonderful conjurer was to perform in one room, and some celebrated glee singers in another, and a "*cirque*" with "a distinguished troupe of equestrians" were to exhibit their "deeds of daring" on the lawn of Contango Abbey. Some "bounding brothers" were to astonish our weak minds in the dairy garden, while

some “Wild Bedouins of the desert” were to frighten us out of our senses, in the rosary. In short, as Lord Templecombe declared, the place was to be made as like Cremorne as possible, and the whole was to conclude with a “grand pyrotechnic display,” which would illuminate the heavens for miles round Dumbleton.

At Lord Templecombe’s express desire, all the Parkinses, Rose and Arthur included, received invitations to this *fête*, and the good-natured young man called himself at George Redfern’s door to ensure the presence of “the missis” and the little son and heir of what he persisted in calling “the Greenleaf family.”

Nothing was now talked of in Dumbleton but this grand entertainment. Persons of all classes were invited to be present, though only the *crème de la crème* were to be ad-

mitted to the dancing and supper tents, and to the interior of the mansion. Fresh reports were circulated every day, each one more wonderful than the last; and the public expectation was at length raised to such a pitch as to be almost ludicrous.

I went up in my donkey chair with Tom, and saw everything that was to be seen. It was a lovely evening, and nothing could be better than the general effect of the scene; the dark, cedar trees spreading out their long, graceful branches over the little gipsy tents, lighted up and furnished with rustic chairs and small, round tables covered with refreshments. The long alleys and groves were resplendent with bright, twinkling lamps of every imaginable colour, some glowing like fireflies among the branches, while others nestled humbly in the turf like glow-worms. It was like a scene

of enchantment, from the Arabian Night's Entertainment — Sinbad's Valley of Diamonds, and even the Cave of Aladdin, were not to be compared to it, I am sure. The circus was a great feature in the entertainment, and this *divertissement* afforded perhaps the greatest attraction to the middle class guests. The "deeds of daring" were stupendous, and gave immense satisfaction to little Master Redfern and his friends. The conjurer conjured to successive rooms full of admirers, and the glee singers sang to the lovers of harmony. The great tent was filled with throngs of gay dancers, and the amount of refreshments provided in different places for persons of all classes, seemed perfectly inexhaustible. "Nothing could have been better managed," was the verdict pronounced by everybody present. Sir Robert walked about the lawn, and spoke a

few courteous words to every one who happened to cross his path ; Lady Venetia flitted hither and thither, smiling and saying civil things, and was invariably followed by admiring looks and flattering opinions. Lady Diana, though not so handsome, and less popular than her sister, nevertheless came in for her full share of admiration ; Lord Templecombe and Spencer Hamilton were indefatigable in their endeavours to make things go off well and successfully.

Everybody seemed to be merry and happy but my poor Sydney. She devoted herself to me, and seldom left my side as long as I stayed ; but I left at a very early hour, and if I relate all that happened afterwards, you will naturally be tempted to ask, how I could by any possibility know anything about the matter ; at the same time it is ne-

cessary, in order to carry on my story, that I should mention several little things which only reached my ears at second hand, a long time afterwards.

In the first place, Nora Verney danced several times with John Beaumont, and afterwards walked with him round the illuminated shrubberies, from which promenade they returned in a very satisfactory state of mind, for having what is commonly called “understood each other” for some time past, this very exemplary, but rather uninteresting young couple had taken this opportunity of arriving at a thorough exposition of their feelings—a proceeding which needs no repetition, their feelings being so very much the same as other people’s feelings, on similar occasions, that the process is no doubt perfectly familiar to yourself, among the rest.

John Beaumont was rich, good-looking,

sensible, and by no means vulgar, though he was a Dumbleton man of business, I must say that for him! Honour Verney was handsome, accomplished and excellent in every relation of life; but she was poor, and she was not happy with Lady Venetia, whose house was now her only home; so, though we all looked a little shocked, when first we heard the event talked of, and wondered Miss Verney should choose to marry a man so much beneath her, we all ended by thinking it a very suitable marriage, and in prophesying that they would be a very happy pair of people.

“Come, Sydney, my dear, don’t sit moping here by yourself,” said Mrs. Bowyer Dawkins to my child, after I left her. “Come! come! don’t let people see you look so melancholy. They will all say you are jealous, you know, and that would be such a pity.”

"What is the matter?" inquired Lady Diana, coming up at this moment. "Why does not she dance and enjoy life like the rest of us? Surely she can't expect Spencer to sit still in a corner, and flirt with her all the evening. It would be too absurd."

"Of course it would—much too absurd," said Mrs. Dawkins. "Spencer knows better than to make himself so ridiculous. Besides Venetia would, I suspect, object very decidedly to that arrangement," she added, with her peculiarly harsh, disagreeable laugh.

Sydney shivered, and murmured something about the damp.

"Nonsense! don't be silly," whispered her tormentor, as Lady Diana, with a shrug of her shoulders, turned away. "You must not betray yourself, before everybody in this way. Let us go into the great tent, and watch the dancers. It will be warm enough

there." And, unwilling to be laughed at, Sydney took Mrs. Dawkins's proffered arm, and accompanied her into the tent, to be an unwilling witness of her husband's assiduous attentions to the lady of the house, which though very proper and becoming from a private secretary, to the wife of his *chef*, were not so agreeable to witness, as perhaps they ought to have been, to the young and jealous wife of the private secretary.

However, the cruel Mrs. Dawkins would not spare Sydney one soft look, one whisper, one item of devotion. She commented freely upon all that Spencer said and did, and looked and thought, and wondered Sir Robert allowed it, and then praised Sydney for having the spirit to sit by and look on so quietly,—as if the poor child's heart were not breaking all the time, in spite of her quiet demeanour.

At length, tired of this little pastime, and anxious to break up a *tête-à-tête* conversation between Lady Diána and Lord Templecombe, which seemed to be interesting, and therefore promised to be dangerous, Mrs. Bowyer Dawkins went to the other end of the tent, and left Sydney in peace.

She found a chair half hidden behind a bower of decorations—evergreens and flags at the end of the tent, and here she hoped to escape observation and have time to rest and think. Presently her attention was roused by voices on the other side of the “trophy,” as it was called. She recognised the speakers instantly, as her husband and Lady Venetia.

“I own I am a little disappointed in her,” the Lady was remarking, in a deprecating voice, as she sat down. “I fancied we should have been able to make more of her when

once we got her away from that vulgar mother of hers ; but I don't seem to get on with her the least in the world. I don't quite understand her, I think."

"There's nothing to understand," replied Spencer. "She is a mere, good, simple, child—perhaps the less you try to make of her the better, Via. She is affectionate and impulsive, but, as you warned me, a little inclined to be jealous. I have watched her closely, and I see you were quite right about that. But there is no harm in the poor girl. I might have done fifty times worse, I must confess."

"It's me they are talking of ! Oh ! what shall I do ?" said Sydney to herself. "If I get up and go away now, they will see me, and will know that I have heard all, and then some explanation must follow. No ! I have not the courage for that—I

must wait. — Perhaps they will go soon."

"You know, dear Spencer," continued Lady Venetia, after a pause, "whatever happens, I shall consider myself the person most to blame in this matter. It was my doing, entirely. I did what I thought was for the best. You acquit me, there, Spencer? You do me at least that justice. If I was mistaken in the girl, at least, my advice was well meant. Tell me you believe this."

"Oh! of course, I know you meant to do what was the wisest thing under the circumstances, both for me and for yourself, Via," said Spencer, with a shade of sarcasm in his voice, which he could not entirely repress. "But remember what I said at the time, that if the girl's happiness was to be sacrificed, the sin must be on your head, not mine. I never pretended to care the least in the

world about her. I only asked her to marry me to please you, Via, and I am sure I have been decently civil to her, ever since. I hope I shall never treat her unkindly, poor little soul ! but it is hard work living all your life long with a person you don't care about, and if she takes to being jealous and tiresome she will end by irritating me beyond all bounds of endurance. I sincerely trust, that I may not turn out an ill-tempered brute one of these days. But I see my way to such a catastrophe, if she does not learn to hold her tongue, and if she persists in looking like a victim, every time I speak to you, Via. That horrid woman, Mrs. Bowyer Dawkins, is at the bottom of it all. I believe Sydney would never have had the sense to think of it for herself."

"Augusta hates me, and if she could get up some scandal about us, she would be

dearly gratified ; but, Spencer, she will go soon, and we shall all be dispersing, and you must come to Midsummer Verney as usual, won't you ? I could manage Sydney better, if I had her all to myself, in my own house, I know ; and it will be so dreadfully, so unbearably dull if you don't come. She will get fond of me there, you will see ! Augusta is poisoning her mind here, about us ; but we can soon drive all that nonsense out of her head, when once she is at Midsummer Verney. Sir Robert rather likes her, and is quite delighted with the marriage altogether, and thinks it such an excellent thing for you, and gives me great credit for having managed it all so well, which is more than *you* do, ungrateful boy ! After all, think how much your position is improved, and you have a most comfortable *ménage*, I am sure. Your prospects for the

future are really brilliant, if you would only look at them in the right light."

"I do look at them, Via, and I don't like them—in what seems to me the right light. You had better have let me go abroad as I wanted to do, some time ago. As it is, in the first place, I have got the credit of being a fortune-hunter, and marrying the girl for her money, which you know was not the case. I don't care a rap for her fortune. I would rather have made my own fortune in my own way. As it is, I am

'Lost to life, and use, and name, and fame.'

But you would insist on my marrying an heiress, Via, and you know very well that I have never yet had the courage to disobey you. I wish I had. Then, this poor girl might have made some honest man happy, and perhaps have been happy herself, with

some one who loved her ! Do you ever think of what her life will be now, Via ? bound for ever, to a man who does not even pretend to care about her. I don't dislike her, certainly—that would be impossible ; but she bores me with her wistful looks—her very anxiety to please me, worries me, and if she begins to be jealous of you, it will be perfectly insupportable. It must end in a crash at last, and I think, to tell you the truth, the whole thing has been a mistake from beginning to end. I am half sick of it already. To live always so near *you*, Via, and yet to be so very, very far from you, is death—torture—worse than death to me. It would have been much kinder to let me go free three months ago, instead of rivetting me to your side by additional chains ; but—Good Heavens, what's that ?—a spark !—smoke ! By Jove, the tent is on fire !"

A wild shriek now rent the air—agonizing screams of terror from many voices. The tent had caught fire.

CHAPTER VI.

“SAUVE QUI PEUT.”

“For sadder scene was ne’er disclosed,
Without, within, in hideous show,
Devouring flames resistless glow,
And blazing rafters downwards go,
And never holla ‘heads below!’
Nor notice give at all.”

REJECTED ADDRESSES.

Yes! there was no doubt about the matter;
the tent was unmistakably on fire. Some
of the long streamers of blue calico which
decorated the roof, had become ignited, and

the flames had spread from one banper to another, unperceived by the merry dancers below, till they were warned of their danger by seeing the sparks and tinder fall from the roof of the tent. The panic that ensued was instantaneous and alarming.

The openings in the tent were few and far between, and to these, crowds of terrified, screaming women rushed simultaneously, while husbands and fathers made frantic efforts to secure the safety of their own particular "women-kind."

Sydney sat still for some moments, feeling perfectly stupefied, and scarcely knowing what was passing around her. The conversation she had just overheard, had confirmed her worst fears, and it seemed to her that nothing was now left to her worth living for. Death would be the greatest blessing that could befall her.

But at this moment, her eye was attracted by the flames which darted and wreathed their long tongues towards her, like living creatures thirsting for her blood. “Oh! not that!” she cried, as she shrunk back instinctively. “Burning is too terrible! Oh! Spencer! save me! Save your wife. Don’t leave me here alone, to die! Spencer! Spencer! come to me! Help me.”

As she stood, with her hands stretched out imploringly towards her husband, instinctively crying to him for help, as a little lost child cries for its mother, she caught a glimpse of Spencer in the distance. He could not hear her! there was a great noise and confusion, and screaming, in the tent now. The fire, too, roared and crackled furiously, and it was quite impossible he could have heard Sydney’s appeal. Neither could he see her, for he was intent only

upon protecting Lady Venetia from the burning fragments and sparks that fell from the roof of the tent. One arm was thrown round her as he hurried her away towards the nearest aperture, while with the other, he shielded her lovely face from the scorching flames with his hat; but he never looked back to the place where the woman whom he had sworn to love and cherish, was calling to him in vain, to save her from a terrible and fearful death.

She dared not attempt to follow him. The pillars supporting the tent were covered all over with dry branches and strips and bows of calico. These had now caught fire, and she could not pass them without danger in her light, gauzy, floating dress. She sought a way of escape through the tent behind her, but all was closed in securely with the strong sail-cloth; and at length,

becoming giddy with the stifling smoke, Sydney sunk to the ground with a wail of despair, and gave herself up for lost. It seemed to her, that she lay there for hours, but her only thought was, “they will be glad!—they will be very glad when they hear I am dead. He will be free again now. He will be happy—and she—”

But at this moment, a sharp knife, wielded by a firm and skilful hand, made a long rent in the tent behind her, and the stalwart form of George Redfern appeared in the opening so made, peering in to see if perchance some unfortunate creature were still left at that end of the tent. Stumbling over the apparently senseless form of a woman, lying on the ground at his feet, George picked Sydney gently up, and bore her away to a safe distance under the trees, where he left her on the soft grass to recover

at her leisure, while he ran back to render further assistance in tearing down the burning tent, and in checking the advance of the "devouring element."

But Sydney was not absolutely unconscious, and after a few minutes she recollected perfectly all that had passed before the fire broke out. "So it *is* true," was her first thought. "Mrs. Dawkins was right, after all. He does love her, and I am nothing to him. The tent will soon be pulled down and left to burn itself out, and no great harm will be done;—nobody is hurt—they have all got safely out of it. But the fire that rages in my heart, will never be extinguished. It will burn on and on, all my life. I cannot stay here and see Spencer again. I cannot live here, knowing that he does not love me—that he has never loved me—that he loves another woman all

the time. It is too much—I must go away out of their sight. This is a good opportunity. I will go this very night. In all this confusion, no one will notice me in the crowd; and if it is supposed to-morrow that I am dead—that I have perished in the flames—so much the better. It may cause them perhaps one moment’s remorse; but after awhile they will only be glad—glad to have got rid of an incumbrance. He will wait till Sir Robert dies (he is an old man now), and then he will marry Venetia. I see it all—and they shall never, never know that I am left alive to torment them.”

With these words the wretched girl raised herself from the ground, and crept stealthily through the darkest part of the grounds into the garden of Contango Abbey. All the servants were out, and hard at work on the Manor House lawn, tearing down tents,

carrying water, seeking their friends and relations. The house, too, was quiet and deserted. Sydney gained her own room safely. "Now," she thought, "I must have all my wits about me ! Let me see ! I must have money, and a few clothes. That is the first essential point."

Sydney sat still for a little while to collect her scattered senses, and then bathed her forehead and hands with cold water. She found some salvolatile on her dressing-table, and took a strong draught of it, to keep her nerves up to the necessary pitch. Then she felt revived, and ready for action. Hastily changing her white gown for one of black silk—the plainest she had—Sydney proceeded to fill a small carpet-bag with linen and the necessaries of the toilette. From a little writing-case she took her purse, and counted its contents. Thirty pounds

were left of the fifty that her stepfather had placed in her hands on her wedding day, as her first quarter's allowance. Two hundred pounds every year was, he told her, to be placed to her account at his banker's, and he had given her a cheque book of her own, that she might draw for this money whenever she required it. Spencer had wished her to have this little fund at her own command, quite independent of himself.

“I will take this—it is my own money, at all events,” said Sydney; “but, ah! these rings! these bracelets! Miss Wolff said a wife had no right to her jewels and trinkets. I will take them all off, and leave them behind me—my wedding-ring too? Yes, that shall go with the rest. It is his. Let him have it back. He will be glad of it, I dare say.”

But starting up suddenly, she exclaimed

—"If I leave these about, they will know I am not burnt—they will hunt me out and bring me back again. Miss Wolff said the police could catch me, and bring me back by force. That will never do. I must hide them. My bonnet, my gown too, will betray me. I must hide them all. Ah! I know what I will do. I will put them in the old nursery, with those boxes of mamma's that were left behind and locked up there. Nobody will think of opening that room. Besides, I have the key, and I will take it away with me."

Tearing off all her rings and ornaments, Sydney threw them into a little box which lay on her table, and rolled that up in her white gown. Her mantle and her pretty little lace bonnet with its wreath of white roses, she ruthlessly crushed into the bundle, and pinning them all up in an old shawl

that she found in her wardrobe, she seized a bunch of keys from a drawer and ran with her parcel, up to the top of the house. Here, in the old nursery, Eliza had deposited divers trunks and packing cases, which she wished to remain undisturbed during her absence abroad. With the bunch of keys which had been left in her charge, Sydney opened one of the great boxes, threw her bundle into it, and relocked it carefully ; and then again, locking the door of the room, she put the keys in her pocket. “They will suppose mamma has the keys with her,” she said to herself, “and will not think of trying to open this room, so that is safe ; and now to slip out of the house unperceived.” Returning to her room, Sydney now put on the darkest and quietest-looking bonnet she could find, with a thick gauze veil and a large water-proof cloak, and

taking up her carpet-bag, which was fortunately not very heavy, she stole cautiously down the back staircase and out through the empty servants'-hall to the stable gate. She only met a kitchenmaid, who, being nervous, gave a little scream, and then observed audibly, "Lawk-a-daisy me! why, who's that? Oh, it's only one of them maids from the Manor, been in to see the fun, I'll warrant me," she added, as Sydney passed her quickly without answering; "and they are such a set of fine ladies in there, that they don't think me good enough to speak to, bless your heart! Ah! well I don't care! I consider *them* no better than so much rubbish, so that's all even;" and grumbling to herself, Betsey disappeared into the recesses of her kitchen, and Sydney reached the back entrance in safety, and was soon out on the high road skirting the Com-

mon. Here were stationed numbers of cabs, flies, and carriages waiting for the company at the Manor House. Many of them were empty and deserted, but at length, Sydney was fortunate enough to find one fly whose driver was fast asleep inside it. Having roused the man, she made him understand that she wished to be taken to the station; and, before the smoke and the glare from the burning tent had quite disappeared, Sydney was driven away from her home, with her carpet-bag by her side, without a notion where she was going to, or what was to become of her, after she reached London.

When once at the station, Sydney began to feel more afraid of being recognised. A train was going to London in ten minutes, and fresh passengers arrived from the Manor House every minute. Men of business from

the confectioner's, waiters, tent fitters, the conjurer and his assistants, and the glee singers, were all of them going back to Town by this train, and Sydney, in her black dress and thick veil, passed for one of the same class as themselves. She thought it safer to take a second-class ticket, and having persuaded a good-natured porter to put her bag under the seat, she took her place in an empty carriage which was waiting to be picked up by the train as it passed Dumbleton station ; special carriages having been provided, with a view to the convenience of passengers attending Lady Venetia's grand *fête*.

Sydney's carriage was soon filled, and presently "the resonant steam eagle" swooped into the station, panting, and puffing, and screaming, as if quite out of breath from its long journey. After a good deal of shunt-

ing backwards and forwards, the Dumbleton carriages were duly picked up and hooked on, and carried off into the darkness towards London.

“ Well,” said some man who sat opposite to Sydney, “ it has gone off very well, if it had not been for that *counter-tom* about the tent catching fire. I can’t make out how it was, but it must have been some carelessness of Brown’s men in putting up the lights.”

“ There was fine confusion inside, I hear,” said the man next him, “ all the ladies running and screeching like mad. They do say there’s one young woman missing now—leastways, she ain’t been seed since, as they tell me.”

“ Ah !” added a man in a further corner, “ I heard tell of that ; and, what’s wuss, they do say it’s the young gentleman’s wife,

what was married here about three months back. He likes Sir Robert's wife the best of the two, it seems, and so he got her safe away out of the fire, and left his own wife to burn there."

"Well! that's a bad job, too!" said the first speaker. "But I am not surprised at it. It's all of a piece with everything the aristocracy does. It don't surprise me—not a bit."

"Why, Jack, *you* need not talk," retorted his neighbour. "I don't know much about the aristocracy; but I see you give your missis as good a black eye last week, as ever I saw in my life."

"What's that got to do with it?" replied Jack. "Nancy deserved all she got; but I would not like to leave her to be burnt like a rat in a hole, neither. I'd have got her safe out of the fire first, and give her a black

eye arterwards, if I'd wanted to ; but that's not the way these here gentlemen does the business, I suppose. We all has our own ways of going on, in every class of life, you see.”

The laugh and the rough jokes that followed this speech lasted the party, till they reached the London terminus, and poor Sydney was most thankful to be relieved from the company of her fellow travellers. It was by this time nearly midnight ; but the train had started from a large seaport town, and many of the passengers were expected at the great hotel adjoining the station.

Sydney humbly followed the multitude, and was fortunate enough to be provided with a little bedroom on the sixth story, to which she and her carpet-bag were safely conveyed in the lift. It was a real luxury to be alone at last, and to think over her plans for the future. A good-natured

chamber-maid brought her a cup of tea, and also, at her desire, "Bradshaw's Railway Guide."

"Now I must make up my mind where I shall hide," said Sydney, opening the map of England and spreading it out on the bed beside her, for there was no table large enough to hold it. "I dare not go to papa and mamma. They would, perhaps, persuade me to come back again; not that Spencer would want me, but *she* might wish it. She would like to have the whole matter hushed up, no doubt, for her own sake, and Spencer would make me come back to please her. Miss Wolff said, a husband could force his wife to come home again. Where *can* I go, to be safe. Scotland? Ireland? Wales? Ah! what's this?—the Isle of Man! I never heard of anybody who ever went to the Isle of Man. It is not difficult to get

at. Let me see—I must go to Liverpool, and there I shall find a steamer all ready. Now for a train to Liverpool. Oh, dear! how clever I am growing, all of a sudden. They would not think me such a fool now, if they knew all. And I must get a little more money. I will write a cheque, and date it a week back, and get it changed as I go to the station. That's well thought of. And what's more, I think I'll dress like a widow. It looks so much more respectable. I shall have time for that in the morning, and I must call myself something—Mrs. Hope? No—that might betray me at once—and besides, it would be a most inappropriate name to me just now, when I have no hope left. A very “forlorn hope” I should be!” she added with a faint attempt to smile. “Mrs. Horton might do. Sarah Horton—that sounds well, and will agree

with the mark on my linen, too. Now for the cheque."

Opening her writing-case, she made out a cheque for one hundred pounds, to be paid to Sarah Horton, or bearer, and ante-dated it, so that it might not be given as evidence that she was alive after the fire. She then threw herself on the bed, but could not sleep,—the voices of her husband and Lady Venetia haunted her—and then the glare of the flames flashed across her brain, whenever she closed her eyes; and she started up in alarm to find it was only a dream.

After a miserable, feverish night, she rose at an early hour, and after obtaining a cup of coffee and a roll, she sallied forth to make her purchases. It was an odd sensation to Sydney to be walking alone in the streets, of London; but few people were about, and the shops were only just opening for the

day. At a large second-rate "emporium" she obtained a "lady's robe, complete," of black stuff, warranted to fit any figure, and also a mantle, a widow's cap and bonnet with a long crape veil. Calling a cab she conveyed her goods back to the hotel herself, and hastily completed her toilette. Having packed up most of the clothes she left home in, she gave the rest to the goodnatured chamber-maid. She then drove to the Bank where her money had been placed, and with trembling hands presented her own cheque, dreading lest the clerks should cross-question her on the subject. But they were all far too busy to trouble either her, or themselves, with questions. If they thought twice about her, they only took it for granted that she was Mrs. Spencer Hamilton's dressmaker, who had lately had her "little account" settled, and so she passed out unnoticed to

her cab, with her hundred pounds safely in her pocket. From thence, Sydney proceeded to Euston Square, in time to catch an express train to Liverpool, and this time she travelled first-class, feeling that there was little danger now, of being recognised in her widow's weeds.

The good steamer, "Mona's Isle," was waiting alongside the quay, ready to start, when Sydney went on board ; and in another quarter of an hour she was seated on deck, watching the ships as they floated down the river with the tide, on their long outward-bound voyages. "Alas ! poor ships !" she thought, "how many of you will come safely home again ? You look so gay and gallant with your bright new paint and your pretty white sails, but I fear some of you may be wrecked and battered to pieces on hard, cruel, treacherous rocks yet. Good-bye, poor

ships—I was once as happy and as hopeful as you are ; but now, I have lost my masts and my sails, and there is nothing left of me, but that—” and as she spoke, she looked pitifully at a weather-beaten, dismantled hull which was being towed up the river by a little tug-steamer. “ Ah ! shall I ever find a kind friend, I wonder, to take me by the hand, and lead me safely into harbour ?”

CHAPTER VII.

LOST AND GONE.

“ But now
The shackles of an old love straighten'd him.
His honour rooted in dishonour stood,
And faith, unfaithful kept him falsely true.”

TENNYSON.

KNOWING nothing of all Sydney's adventures
—I was quietly making breakfast the next
morning, when I was surprised to hear a
carriage drive rapidly up to the gate,
followed by a violent ringing of the
bell.

"Something must have happened to James," was my first thought, for I was not yet aware of the fire at the Manor House.

Tom came out from his study, and I heard several persons talking at once, in a loud and excited manner. The sad news was soon told. Sydney was missing. It was supposed, at first, that she had perished in the flames; but this was now doubted, and they hoped she might, for some reason, have come to us.

Mr. Hamilton looked pale and haggard, and seemed almost beside himself with alarm. "They say, it is impossible she can have been burnt. They must have found some remains of the body. That man Redfern says, he carried her out of the tent himself. He could take his oath it was her he saved. Where can she be?

Why should she not have gone home? She can't be burnt. I tell you it's totally impossible." Spencer kept repeating this incoherently, without waiting to listen to what Tom had to say.

"Are the clothes she wore in her room?" I asked, thinking it just possible that she might have run away from home.

"No; they are not to be found anywhere. But she may have fainted and been carried off; or she may have been so frightened, that she ran away to some other house."

"When did you last see her?" asked Tom.

For a moment, a deep shade of colour crossed Spencer's face, as he considered; "I saw her several times in the course of the evening—I can't remember exactly when. Of course I did not stay much with her,

you know: she was dancing, like other people, I suppose; but we have been seeking her everywhere, ever since day-break, and she is nowhere to be heard of."

"Have you been to the Alexandra? Mrs. Dawkins may have taken her home with her;" I suggested.

"No, I thought of that; but they have not seen her—that horrid woman swears she has run away, but that's nonsense; why should she run away? What had she to complain of? It's absurd to talk of such a thing as that," said Spencer, looking anxiously at Tom and me.

I could not answer him, but Tom proposed that he should telegraph to her mother.

"It may be *absurd*, but it is by no means impossible that she may have gone to her mother," he remarked, gravely. "Your

attentions to Lady Venetia, Mr. Hamilton, have not passed unnoticed by us, and my poor niece may have been rendered unhappy by your conduct. Remember that, if you please," he added, "in making your calculations."

Spencer looked a little conscience-stricken, but soon recovered himself, and protested vehemently that it was ridiculous and foolish to say such things. His cousin and he were old friends, quite like brother and sister in fact, and it was scandalous to spread such reports. It was hard upon Lady Venetia, as well as upon himself, but he knew the originator of the whole story. It was all the doing of that odious, disreputable friend of Diana's.

After saying a good deal more in the same strain, Mr. Hamilton begged of me to go back in his carriage to the Abbey, and

talk to the servants, and examine Sydney's wardrobe to see if anything was missing; while he went to the station with Tom, and made further enquiries.

The poor man was evidently in a state of considerable anxiety on Sydney's account, and I could not help feeling a little pity for him, though I was excessively angry at the same time. I still hoped we might hear Sydney had gone off to her mother, in a fit of jealousy, and that we should hear of her, or from her, very soon.

I found the whole household at Contango Abbey in a state of the utmost confusion, and all the servants perfectly convinced that their mistress had been burnt to death in the tent. But, at length, I persuaded her terrified maid to look over her things, quietly, with me.

In comparing the list with the clothes,

we found missing (besides what Sydney had worn on the previous evening) several changes of linen, a black silk gown, a black lace bonnet and veil, and a cloak. The carpet-bag and the writing case, upon further search, we also missed, as well as some brushes and combs from her dressing-table.

Miss Talbot suggested that a thief had got into the house and stolen the missing articles, so anxious was she to believe in the more horrible tragedy of the two; but I felt convinced in my own mind, that Sydney, stung to the heart by some fresh proof of her husband's affection for Lady Venetia, had left her home, and gone straight to my brother, at Cannes.

Before Spencer returned, Lady Venetia came in, followed by her sister and Mrs. Dawkins.

When they heard my report, the latter

lady exclaimed, triumphantly, "There!" did not I say so? I knew she had only gone off in a pet, poor little thing! We shall have her back again, before long, depend on it."

"It's very odd, Miss Lambert," said Lady Venetia, "but Augusta declares, dear Sydney had somehow taken amiss some trifling thing her husband had said to her—something, in short, about me, I believe," she continued, hurriedly; she seemed determined, I thought, to tell the story in her own way, before anybody else could give their version of it. "But however that might be, they had some little misunderstanding, I fancy. These little lovers' quarrels will sometimes happen between newly-married people; the child is of a terribly jealous disposition, evidently, and perhaps she took it into her head, that Spencer paid me too much attention—such very great nonsense, you

know. But I have no doubt, he was a little put out at this, and I dare say, he answered sharply, as men sometimes do, when they are in a passion, without really meaning anything in the world, you know. It is quite a pity; but I am sure she will think better of it, as Augusta says, and come back to her home in a few days, —perhaps even this very day; you would advise her to do so, I am sure, Miss Lambert. Sir Robert is quite annoyed about it, and it will naturally make us all feel very uncomfortable, till we know where she is. Here come the gentlemen, and Sir Robert with them. I hope they bring us some tidings of our poor pet.”

“I never was more vexed in my life,” Sir Robert was saying, as he entered the room. “It is a most awkward and unfortunate business, from beginning to end.

I can't quite understand it all yet. It is very extraordinary why the girl should leave her home ; I can see no reason for it, at all."

Spencer said nothing, but sat down on the sofa, looking gloomy and angry, with everybody. Lady Venetia began to tell her story all over again, in the most plausible manner, but nobody listened to her, very attentively.

"I think," said Tom, in the middle of it, "the first thing to be done, is to telegraph to my brother, at Cannes, and ask if she is there."

"It makes it dreadfully public," said Lady Venetia. "It is such a bore, to have it known all over Dumbleton."

"It is a greater bore, still, that it should have happened at all," said Spencer, sulkily. "Now all we can do, is to find out where she is gone to."

"Yes! my good friend, you must tele-

graph to her mother, as soon as possible ; and if she is at Cannes, she had better stay there, till this has all blown over, I should say," remarked Sir Robert ; " in the meantime we can do no good by staying here, Venetia ; the Lamberts would prefer to be alone, no doubt. A sad business—a very unfortunate business, indeed ; and, as I said before, Lambert, I can't understand it at all. I can't tell, what to make of it. Spencer, you will of course, wish to stay and settle some plan with Lambert, for finding this little runaway. Venetia, are you ready ?"

" I think I shall go to town, to-morrow, Miss Lambert," said Lady Venetia, rising ; " we shall probably leave Dumbleton at once. The election is happily over, and there is nothing to keep us from Midsummer Verney, now ; I confess I am longing to get away. After all this *esclandre*, it will

be most disagreeable to me to remain here, so, in case I should not have the pleasure of seeing you again, Miss Lambert, I will wish you good-bye. I sincerely hope you will soon hear of your dear, little niece, and not be kept in suspense about her much longer. Good-bye, Spencer, I have not the least doubt she is with her mother, and heartily sorry, by this time, for her very foolish conduct."

With this comfortable suggestion, Lady Venetia followed Sir Robert out of the room.

"Well, Mr. Hamilton, and what do you propose to do next?" asked my brother, after the Verneys had driven off.

"Mr. Lambert," said Spencer, frankly, "I see you are angry with me, and, perhaps, justly so ; I will be perfectly open with you, now. I am willing to take the whole of the

blame on myself. I ought never to have married Sydney, that is the fact of the matter. It was an ill-judged and hasty proceeding; I was over-persuaded in a moment of weakness, and I am afraid, poor child! she has not been happy with me, though I have not treated her unkindly. You must acquit me of that, at all events."

"You married her without caring for her—for the sake of her fortune, I presume," said Tom, after a pause.

"No! no! not exactly that. It is difficult to explain it to you, Mr. Lambert, without bringing in the name of another person. But I cannot say, I was actuated entirely by mercenary motives. I confess I did not love your niece; but I was anxious to marry, and she seemed to me to be a good, unsophisticated, simple, little girl, who would be happy with anybody, as long as she was

kindly used, and had all her comforts and amusements around her. In this, I have been disappointed. Sydney has more heart than I thought she had. She unfortunately found out that I—in short, that I had been previously engaged to—a lady. . Circumstances had prevented our marriage; but I fear, my feelings for—for—that lady are still unchanged, and poor Sydney suspected this—or had, more probably, been told the whole story by some mischief-making woman, or another. If she would only have had a little patience with me, poor thing! I might have grown fond of her in time. That she was taught to suspect me, and to take this rash step, I have no doubt; but I have no desire to find fault with her. I would give all I am worth, if I could undo the past, and leave her the happy, gay, childish creature she was, when I first saw her. I feel you must

all hate me, for having made her life miserable ; but it is too late, to talk about that now. The only thing that remains for me to do, is to make her every reparation that lies in my power. To prove to you, Mr. Lambert, that money was not my first object in marrying your niece, (as you are kind enough to consider her), I must ask you to take charge of the whole of her fortune. I shall never touch a farthing of it—nothing would induce me to do so. I have made up my mind to do, what I ought to have done, long ago—to leave England. If by any means, you should soon be enabled to communicate with Sydney, tell her that as far as I am concerned, she is free. If it would add to her happiness to be separated from me, you, Mr. Lambert, will know how it is to be managed, and I shall offer no impediments. I have not sinned

against my wife in the eyes of the law, you may be assured of this, upon the honour of a gentleman ; but if you find it would make her in the slightest degree more comfortable to have a legal separation from me, you will, I have no doubt, be good enough to have the necessary deeds made out at once ; and remember, if you please, that for my part, I at once resign any claim on my wife's property, to which I might be entitled, by the marriage settlements. You quite understand this."

"I think you are acting justly and honourably, Mr. Hamilton," said Tom ; "but we must first find out where the poor child is. That is our first consideration."

"I don't feel uneasy about her," said Spencer, addressing me. "I now feel convinced she must have gone straight to her mother. We shall hear of her, I hope, before long. She was not without means. In her

writing-case, which is missing, she had money, and her own cheque-book. She had also jewels on, which were of great value. Therefore, I cannot help feeling that she contemplated this step, and had made her preparations before-hand. But I own, it would be a relief to me, to know where she is, before I leave the country. And now I will go at once and consult Sir Robert on the expediency of getting some appointment abroad. I have no doubt, he will exert his influence on my behalf."

"Poor little Sydney," said I with a sigh. "How little I thought her happiness would so soon be at an end."

"She might have been happy still, Miss Lambert, if they would only have let her alone. She had nothing in reality, to complain of. I do not believe for one moment, that Sydney would ever have found out for

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herself that I was not very much in love with her. It must have been put into her head by others. I don't mean to deny, that I have been very much to blame," he added presently ; " but I do believe that if we had been left to ourselves, we might have been very comfortable together. I would never have denied her any pleasure, or amusement she chose to fancy. There was nothing I would not willingly have done, to make her life a pleasant one, poor little thing !"

" But she was aware that she had not your heart, Mr. Hamilton," I could not resist saying ; " and without that, all these amusements you speak of, were worth nothing to Sydney."

" My heart was not mine to give her," replied Spencer sadly ; " that was the misfortune ; but I should have become attached to her in time, if she would only have trusted

me, and had patience with me. I have no other fault to find with her, but that—distrust, suspicion, jealousy—call it what you like ; but I feel convinced this was originally put into her head by—no matter who. I know whom we have to thank for it, well enough.”

“So do I,” I thought to myself; but I only said, “Indeed, Mr. Hamilton, I am sorry anybody should have thought worth their while to interfere with your domestic happiness. Young married people are better left alone together, in my opinion.”

CHAPTER VIII.

LADY VENETIA'S VERSION OF IT.

"The words that trembled on your lips
Were uttered not. I know it well ;
The tears that would your eyes eclipse
Were checked and smothered, ere they fell ;
The looks and smiles I gained from you,
Were little more than others won,
And yet you were not wholly true,
Nor wholly just what you have done."

LORD HOUGHTON.

IN the meantime, we left no stone unturned
by which we could gain tidings of Sydney.
Tom went up to London and made enquiries

at the various railroad stations and hotels, but to no purpose. Nobody remembered seeing any lady answering to the description Tom gave of Sydney, except that the chambermaid of the hotel, remembered that a fair, young lady had slept in the house the night before, and had left early that morning. She thought the lady was a widow, who had come up to town to buy mourning. She was sure she had no jewels on, and she was dressed in deep black, with a widow's cap—that the girl would take her oath of. So we gave up that hope as a false one.

The next day we had an answer from Cannes. Sydney had not been heard of there. We consoled ourselves, however, by the reflection that she had not had time to get there, and we wrote to James all the particulars of the case, begging him to remain

where he was, for a time, as Sydney was most likely to go to him, eventually.

A week passed in the utmost uncertainty, and our anxiety increased every hour. It was a terrible time altogether. Tom put the matter in the hands of the police, and detectives were employed to trace out our darling, but they could gain no clue whatever to her hiding-place. We advertised in all the papers repeatedly. I even put a little sensational advertisement of my own in the second edition of the "Times" to this effect: "S. H.—Return, or write at once to your Aunt Patty, who is breaking her heart for you. Only say you are safe and well, and she will come to you directly—D." But no answer to this appeal was ever returned. I began to be afraid she had drowned herself, but Tom felt sure she had done nothing of the kind. The common

belief in Dumbleton was, that she had been burnt in the tent, but at this report we were none of us uneasy. She would not have taken her clothes and money had this been the case, and so we lived on, hoping, fearing, conjecturing, and all to no purpose.

Spencer now appeared to be greatly concerned, and spared neither trouble nor expense, in devising plans to gain some intelligence of Sydney, but all was in vain, and we soon began to despair of ever finding our poor, lost child.

Our feelings towards Lady Venetia were not very cordial I am afraid, at this juncture, but Sir Robert and his niece were both extremely kind and full of sympathy for us. From Tom and also from Miss Verney I heard that Lady Venetia was most indignant at being supposed to have had any share whatever in the transaction. She told Sir Robert,

in the presence of his niece, that finding Mr. Hamilton still cherished an absurd and hopeless passion for herself, she thought she was only acting for his happiness, in persuading him to marry a good-natured, pretty little girl with heaps of money. She had fancied that of course, he would soon forget his foolish, little *penchant* for herself, and fall very much in love with his wife. She was surprised, as well as grieved, to find the plan had turned out a complete failure, but she really could not conceive how it could, by any possibility, be said to be any fault of hers. She was sure, she had done all that lay in her power to ensure the happiness of her cousin and his wife. She had talked to them both most seriously on the subject, and had implored Spencer, for *her* sake, to be tender and considerate to the poor thing; but the real truth was, Lady Venetia said,

that Sydney was a very silly girl, literally without an idea in her pretty, little head, and she was also, of an unfortunately jealous disposition, inherited, evidently, from her mother; so instead of trying to please her husband by taking up his old friends and entering into his tastes and pursuits like a sensible woman, she had been seized with the melancholy delusion that Spencer was never to speak to a creature but herself; and as poor Sydney had no sort of conversation, Spencer had naturally got a little bored with her, and had returned to his old habit of coming in and out of Sir Robert's house just as he pleased, and talking over the events of the day, as he had always been in the habit of doing. Lady Venetia regretted exceedingly that her name had ever been mixed up in the business at all, but she felt convinced everybody must see at once

how entirely without foundation poor Sydney's foolish fancies had been, and she trusted that Sir Robert would do her the justice to believe that she had acted for the best, in promoting the marriage in the first instance.

"Then as I understand your story, Venetia, you gave Hamilton no encouragement to believe that you desired his society?" enquired Sir Robert.

"Oh, dear, no! quite the contrary," Lady Venetia answered; "I always told him how it would end—I warned him over and over again; he will tell you the same thing himself. I was sorry for him, of course, poor boy! His home was, I knew, so dull and so different to what he has been accustomed to with us. He has always lived so much with us, you know, Sir Robert, and I could not exactly forbid him the house. Besides, he was obliged to come here to see you, and

I could not easily say he was *never* to enter my drawing-room, could I? It would have astonished the servants, and have raised reports at once. But I went as near it as I could, and administered the strongest hints I dared, on the subject. But he either could not, or would not, understand me, and this is the result."

"I am to believe, then, that you wished Spencer not to be so much with you, Venetia; that you even remonstrated with him on the subject repeatedly, but that he persisted in coming in, as you say, at all hours, and that his wife (very naturally) resented this, and felt a little neglected, as well she might, poor child! only three months after her marriage," said Sir Robert, sternly.

"Oh! but you must not blame Spencer, Sir Robert, for indeed nothing could be kinder than he was to Sydney; and I am

sure, I did everything in my power to make her happy, and in time, I could have educated her into being more of a woman of the world, and have taught her to take some interest in public affairs, and, by degrees, when Spencer found her improving in intellect and intelligence, he would have made more of a companion of her ; that was my scheme."

"She appeared to me, to be a very nice, pleasing person," said Sir Robert ; "quite pretty enough to captivate any young man, and by no means wanting in intelligence ; but I fear she has scarcely had fair play, poor girl ! and I would give a good deal to know what has become of her. But now I must beg, Venetia, that this may be a warning to you ; another time, don't persuade any of your admirers to marry, unless you are quite prepared to lose sight of them

altogether: and oblige me by leaving your friends to conduct the education of their own wives, for the future. This affair has annoyed me beyond all expression, and I must insist upon its not being repeated, as long as you continue to reside under the same roof with myself."

Lady Venetia looked astonished and confounded at this rebuke, but made no answer, and shortly afterwards, retired to her own apartment, where she remained in strict seclusion for the rest of the day.

Sir Robert then rang the bell, and desired the servant to ask Mr. Hamilton to speak to him for five minutes. "Sit still, Nora, I wish you to remain in the room, and hear what I am about to say to Spencer; in fact, I should be glad if you would report the whole of our conversation, to your aunt."

On Spencer's entrance, Sir Robert re-

peated to him Lady Venetia's story, word for word, begging his niece to correct him if he made a mistake. "You see, therefore, Spencer," he concluded, "that by Lady Venetia's own account, she was only anxious to make your married life a happy one, and if you had taken her advice, and devoted yourself to your very charming, young wife, all this unpleasantness might have been easily avoided. I find, too, that your attentions to Lady Venetia have received no encouragement from her; indeed, that she has even been rather annoyed by them, than otherwise. It is therefore better that a stop should at once be put to your visits here. Lady Venetia will, I have no doubt, go at once to Midsummer Verney, where I shall follow her shortly. I have only one more proposition to make to you; I have had a letter lately from the Governor of Trini-

dad, (as you know,) requesting me to accept his resignation, and fill up his post at once. His wife has just died of yellow fever, and he wishes to come home immediately ; I had offered the appointment to your friend, Mr. Prescott, but it seems, his mother is averse to his leaving England. If you choose to go abroad now, (and I assure you, I think, under the circumstances, it is by far the best thing you can do,) I will take Prescott myself in your place, and you will be at liberty to start, without further loss of time. Now, what do you say to this arrangement ?”

And as he spoke, Sir Robert watched his secretary’s face, keenly.

“There is nothing I could have desired better,” cried Spencer ; “it has long been my wish to hold some such appointment, and I am indeed, most grateful to you, Sir

Robert, for your kindness to me ; I feel that it is more than I deserve at your hands, but you have ever been a good and true friend to me. I wish I had it in my power to prove my great sense of your generous forbearance towards me."

Sir Robert looked pleased, and held out his hand to Spencer, telling him to go to Town at once, and make preparations for starting by the next mail.

" You could do nothing that would gratify me more, than your ready acquiescence to this request," he said, cordially ; and Spencer went off to the Abbey to make arrangements for his hasty departure.

As he told me, long afterwards, a curious and sudden revulsion of feeling came over him, as he entered poor Sydney's drawing-room, and threw himself upon a sofa utterly exhausted with conflicting emotions. His

friend, Lady Venetia, had betrayed him ; denied him, so to speak. She had told Sir Robert that he had annoyed her with his attentions, and that it was in defiance of her express desire, that he had been so constantly in her company. “ False, heartless, treacherous woman ! why have I thrown away the best years of my life to please her ? ” Spencer exclaimed, in his anger ; “ I will tear her image from my heart, henceforth and for ever : never again shall she make me her slave ! I have ministered to her over-weening vanity, for the last time in my life. Ah ! if I had only treated my poor, little wife, with half the affection that I have wasted upon Via, she would not have deserted me in my trouble : if I had only loved Sydney, and I might have done so, had I not been a blind, deluded fool, she would not have coldly sneered at my weak-

ness. Sydney, my poor, neglected wife! whatever you may have suffered, you would be avenged could you see me now!" It was a terrible shock to Spencer.

For some hours, he lay thinking over all that had passed, and during this time he told me that afterwards he felt as if his whole mental system had undergone a complete change. He seemed to have passed into another phase of existence altogether. His eyes were opened now, and he saw everything that had passed, in a new light, and from another point of view. His cousin Venetia was no longer a beautiful object of idolatry, who not only condescended to accept his homage, but who had even adored him, in return. No! she was only a cold-hearted, selfish woman, who had lured him on to his destruction; who had encouraged him to admire her and flatter her, as long as she could

do so, without arousing the suspicions of her confiding husband ; but who had turned upon him and mocked at him and denounced him, the moment she feared a breath of scandal might perchance touch her immaculate reputation. She, whom he had so loved and trusted, had represented him to the world, as a poor, weak fool, worthy only of contempt and disdain. Spencer was a proud man, as well as a vain one, and this treachery of his cousin's cut him to the quick. The operation was a painful and severe one, but it had wrought a perfect and complete cure. Spencer was henceforth a free man, as far as Lady Venetia was concerned.

As for Lady Venetia, Nora assured me that she could not help feeling sorry for her. She believed that she had really loved her cousin with all the affection she was capable of feeling ; but she could not bear to lose

ground in the estimation of any human being; and so, rather than risk a word of censure from her husband, or her friends, she had not hesitated to throw the whole blame of the affair on Spencer. Still, Nora was convinced that she bitterly lamented the past; and though she tried to put a good face on the matter and appear cheerful and composed, she looked dreadfully ill and worn at times, and seemed to live in a constant fever of restlessness and agitation.

She soon afterwards left Dumbleton for Midsummer Verney, and Sir Robert went up to his town house, till some work he had in hand was concluded. Nora Verney came to stay at the Wilderness, with the Beaumonts, and was a great comfort to me at this time. She was so kind and thoughtful, and so anxious to do all in her power to allay our worst fears. I had thought Miss

Verney haughty and silent, when first I knew her, but after this, I became greatly attached to her, and was able to congratulate John more heartily on his engagement to her, than I ever had done before. Margaret was devoted to her, and took the most warm and unselfish pleasure in her brother's happiness.

As it appeared that Lady Venetia had declared her firm determination never to inhabit the Manor House again, Sir Robert made it over entirely to his niece. It would become her property, he told her, at his death, and it would give him far greater happiness to see her in it, during his lifetime. If he wanted a few nights out of Town, during the season, he should not hesitate to ask for a room in her house; but Lady Venetia had taken quite a dislike to the place, and it was useless to leave it standing empty for the greater portion of

the year. Margaret was therefore to be left in undisturbed possession of the Wilderness, for with her usual good sense, she refused to take up her abode with the young couple.

I was glad she had a home of her own, at all events. A lodging in Dumbleton would have been but a melancholy prospect for my poor friend.

As for Lady Diana and Mrs. Dawkins, they went, we heard, to Brighton, for the winter. Lord Templecombe shortly afterwards was reported to have taken rooms at an hotel in that fashionable watering-place.

Spencer Hamilton came down to Dumbleton, to wish me good-bye, before he started for his new post. He looked altered in many ways—as if he had suffered deeply, as indeed he had. He entreated me to write

to him, and to let him know, the moment we heard of Sydney.

“ I shall never be able to forgive myself,” he said, “ if any harm has befallen that poor girl. But if you should find her, tell her that I implore her forgiveness for the trouble I have caused her, and if you think there should ever be the slightest chance of her wishing to see me again, Miss Lambert, do not hesitate to let me know at once, and I will come to her—but not before. I feel I do not merit any mercy at her hands, and I will never annoy her in any way. She need not dread my interfering with any plans she may think proper to make for her future comfort.”

CHAPTER IX.

LORD TEMPLECOMBE'S VICTORY.

"A weel-stocked mailen, himsel for the laird,
And marriage aff-hand, were, his proffers,
I never loot on that I ken'd it, or car'd,
But thought I might hae waur offers, waur offers.
But thought I might hae waur offers.

"He begged, for Gudesake ! I wad be his wife,
Or else I wad kill him wi' sorrow ;
So e'en to preserve the poor body in life,
I think I maun wed him to-morrow, to-morrow,
I think I maun wed him to-morrow."

BURNS.

THE good people of Dumbleton were all
most kind and considerate to me, in my

distress, and I will charitably take it for granted, that they were not all actuated solely by motives of curiosity, in calling on me more frequently than usual at this period.

Mrs. Kibble came to offer her husband's services as spiritual adviser, and to beg that I would open my heart to that heavenly-minded man—who would be ready to come at a moment's notice, if Tom, or I, wished to converse with him on the blessings of adversity, or the numerous advantages of a heavy trial.

Mrs. Pybus also came, laden with some peculiarly appropriate tracts and books, which she had kindly looked out for the occasion. She was not surprised, she confessed, that Sydney's marriage had turned out so unfortunately. She had never had any high opinion of the young man, from

the first moment she saw him. It had been a worldly connexion altogether. Sydney had married out of her station. She had left her own class, and had attempted to become a member of the aristocracy, and this was the result! Anybody who had a grain of sense in their composition, might have foretold long ago how it would all end. Lady Venetia Verney had been no benefactress to Dumbleton, that Mrs. Pybus felt very sure of—and she trusted that we were for the future, to be left without the patronage and interference of London fine ladies. That poor, deluded man, William Parkins, owed his destruction entirely to the influence of the aristocracy. If it had not been for Lord Templecombe making William Parkins chairman of his committee, the poor fellow would never have dreamed of such a thing as leaving his place of

worship, and going over to that wicked, deceitful place, S. Monica's, where his head had been completely turned by his being appointed churchwarden. Yes ! actually Mrs. Pybus blushed to think of it ; but her own nephew was Mr. Auriol's churchwarden, and went about after the service, as Mrs. Pybus was credibly informed, carrying a red velvet bag with a gold cross on it, collecting money which he called "alms," forsooth. Oh ! it was shocking ! and as for Sophia, poor girl ! she was working from morning till night, at strips of carpet for the pulpit stairs—white lilies indeed ! Pretty times for Dumbleton, when all the young ladies were to have their work stuck up in the church, instead of sending it to bazaars for the poor, benighted heathen in foreign parts ; but the world seemed to Mrs. Pybus to be turning upside down, as fast as ever it could,

and so it was no use talking. The Kibbles were the only relations she had left, who were any comfort to her—and so kind as she had been to William Parkins and his wife. It was heart-rending to think of it.

Poor Mrs. Pybus was, in fact, so cast down by her own troubles, that the task of consolation fell upon me, and I said all I could, to reconcile her to the conduct of the Parkins family, but without much effect, I fear.

One of the “unkindest cuts of all” to Mrs. Pybus’s mind, was, that she had been told, her special pet and her own godson, little Arthur Parkins, had been put into Mr. Auriol’s choir—and the poor, dear, innocent, little lamb, was dressed up in a little cassock and a little white cape (Mrs. Pybus was sure she did not know by what outlandish name they called it), and was

made to walk up the church in a procession like a little Popish Priest. At his tender years, too! It broke Mrs. Pybus's heart, when she thought of dear, little Arthur's round, rosy face emerging from these vile garments, and she would give the world if she could have rescued her great-nephew from so terrible a position.

The two Miss Wolffs called on me also. Miss Sapientia came in, with a triumphant air of, "I told you so!" that was very aggravating to me. She, like Mrs. Pybus, had known all along what the end of Sydney's marriage would be. She had also seen through Mr. Hamilton at a glance, and read his inmost soul at one interview. If I had gained any new ideas on marriage, or had any important facts to communicate, in consequence of my poor niece's sad experience, Sapientia begged I would not

hesitate to mention them at once, in order that they might be added to the next edition of her publication, in the form of an appendix.

Miss Amelia Wolff brought a new pattern of a pincushion, which had lately come out, and which "took" very well at bazaars, she heard. If it would amuse me to manufacture a dozen or so of them, and sell them to my friends for the benefit of the "Aged Christian's Perambulating Fund," Miss Amelia thought it would be quite a nice, little occupation for me; or I might, (if I preferred it) let the money go towards the "Little Believer's Annual Treat," which was got up by Miss Amelia for the special delectation of believing little boys and girls. In short, as Miss Amelia said, I was quite at liberty to patronise either the "A. C. P. F.," or the "L. B. A. T." She was

almost equally interested in both these little charities.

Old Mrs. Auriol called, in one of her most peevish moods, and inveighed loudly against the world in general, but particularly the clerical world. Wilfred was wearing himself out completely with his daily services, and his chanting, and intoning, and his vestments were perfectly ruinous! nobody knew what a trouble it was, to keep him fit to be seen. Ah! people little knew when they admired his beautiful robes, what an anxiety they were, to his poor mother. And then he would have all the little chorister boys dressed in white, and she had to see that their surplices were clean and properly got up and mended, and the careless little fellows were always crushing and tumbling their things, though, as to that, they were none of them worse than Wilfred himself.

Mrs. Auriol was, in short, afraid to mention what Wilfred's tailor's bill came to, at the end of the year; but it was no use Mrs. Auriol talking, her children never asked her opinion about anything, she was laid quite on the shelf—she saw *that* plainly enough.

“Nonsense, Mrs. Auriol,” said I, trying to humour the old lady; “I am sure, you have as good and dutiful a son and daughter as any woman in the parish.”

“Ah, my dear Miss Lambert, you little know! I hope it is not every mother that has the trouble with their children that I have. There's Agnes has been and engaged herself to Mr. Hatfield, a man with two hundred a year, at the outside, and with no prospects whatever; and there's Wilfred might, to my certain knowledge, marry a young lady at this moment, with a fortune

of five-and-twenty thousand pounds, and he won't so much as look at her: such perverseness, you know!"

I took it for granted the young lady was Miss Parkins, but did not venture to do more than make some little sympathetic gesture, till I was further enlightened.

"And what do you suppose he gives me as a reason for such folly? Why, because Miss Parkins, forsooth, is related to the Kibbles, and her father is in trade; and the girl adores him too! But I know the truth is, he still cares for Sydney—he frets about her sadly—I know he does, and he grows more absent and dreamy every day he lives, and I am always expecting to see him go off in a galloping consumption before my eyes, though I don't know, but what it would be better that he should die first, and then I sha'n't have to think of his being

neglected and cheated after I'm gone, unless indeed, he would make up his mind to marry Sophia Parkins like a sensible man—Sophy is a very good girl. And little Arthur has a nice voice, and looks sweetly pretty, poor child, in the choir, and Mr. Parkins is a most liberal person. Have you seen the new lectern he has given Wilfred?—It's beautiful.”

“Sophy is a silly girl, though, is not she?” said I, consolingly; “and, after all, you must own, they are all a little vulgar, Mrs. Auriol—at least, you used to tell me so.”

“Oh, as to that, we can put up with a little want of refinement when a woman has a large fortune; but my children will be beggars to the end of their days, like their father before them. Wilfred persists in saying that it's wrong for a clergyman to

marry, and is not at all pleased at his sister's engagement to Mr. Hatfield, but as I tell him, a nice state he will be in when I die and he is left an old bachelor, at the mercy of some artful, designing, grasping housekeeper, who will live on the fat of the land, while he may starve, for what she will care, as he would do now, if it were not for me, what with his vigils and other nonsensical whims. I expected Agnes would have lived with him and taken care of him, but now she can think of nobody but Mr. Hatfield, of course, and her brother and I may do as well as we can, without her."

"I think Agnes is quite right," I could not help saying, "and I am sincerely glad to hear Mr. Hatfield is going to have so good a wife. He is a young man for whom I have the highest possible regard, and Agnes is quite worthy of him."

"I can't say I see much to boast of in either the one, or the other of them," replied the cross old dame; "but I must be off, now, and see that Wildred gets his cup of coffee before vespers; he'll never have the sense to think of it, for himself, you may be sure. He never can find out what o'clock it is, and as for ringing the bell, and asking for his own coffee, my dear Miss Lambert, that boy is not capable of such a thing. His father was just the same; if I was not always after him, he would let the grass grow under his feet, before he would exert himself, and Wilfred takes after him exactly. And to think that Sophy Parkins would give her eyes to marry him, and the provoking, obstinate boy won't take the slightest notice of her—five-and-twenty thousand pounds!"

"Well, good-bye, Miss Lambert; it's a

sad world, and we all have our troubles, but I shall always say, if poor Sydney could have made up her mind to have married Wilfred, it might have been the making of him, and what a deal of suffering and anxiety, you and I might have been spared, now. Ah ! and I shall soon have Mr. Hatfield on my hands, too."

Of course Sydney's old friends, the Brokes, were most anxious about her, and came often to see me, though Selina's confinement prevented my seeing much of her, till she was well and about again. But the first visit she paid was to me, and she brought her boy to show me with great pride.

"It is so shocking, dear Miss Lambert, about that poor, dear Sydney — I declare it quite haunts me ; I can think of nothing else. I am so sorry for you, but I thought you would like to see my little

boy—he is a great beauty, is not he? I was sure it would do you good to see him. Lady Cleveden sent him all his clothes; they are so delighted about it. Did you ever see anything so smart as he is? Of course, it is very wicked of me, but I can't help hoping that Templecombe will never marry, so that our son may in time succeed to the title. Does not he look like a young nobleman already—did you ever see a child who looked more fitted to be an earl in his old age? To be sure, it will be a great many years first, because Tempey is quite a young man, still, and not the least likely to die, unless he meets with some accident, and that would be very shocking, you know.

“ Still I don't think it likely that Lord Templecombe will ever marry, do you, Miss Lambert? He will just go running about after Lady Diana Hartland, all his life,

and Mrs. Bowyer Dawkins will take excellent care not to let her marry him. Berresford says, he is convinced Tempey will never marry anybody else, so my pretty little son will be, in all probability, the Earl of Cleveden, by the time he is sixty."

Unfortunately for the prospects of Master Cleveden Broke, however, we soon afterwards read in the "Dumbleton Mercury," that "a marriage had been arranged, between Viscount Templecombe, eldest son of the Right Hon. the Earl of Cleveden, and the Lady Diana Hartland, second daughter of the sixth Earl of Osterley, sister of the present earl, and relict of Frederick Hartland, Esquire, of Hartland Dyke." This paragraph proved to have more truth in it than newspaper reports usually have. As I heard the whole of the particulars, not

long afterwards, I can tell you exactly how it happened.

Mrs. Bowyer Dawkins, it seems, had been confined to the house by a bad cold, for about a week or ten days ;—consequently, Lady Diana was obliged to go out alone, or at least accompanied only, by her hideous little pet, Mr. Quilp ; and dogs, like “ dead men,” tell no tales ; so that Lord Templecombe speeded better in his wooing during Mrs. Dawkins’s term of indisposition, than he had done for many months previous to that propitious event. Lady Diana was reckoned masculine in her manners and habits, yet, she was by no means a strong-minded woman. She was not clever ; and though possessing plenty of physical bravery, she was terribly deficient in moral courage. Thus, she was very much at the mercy of any determined person who chose to exert

an influence over her, and the subtle Mrs. Bowyer Dawkins understood so well how to manage Lady Die, that she had reduced that unfortunate young woman to a state of abject slavery.

Lord Templecombe felt, therefore, that his moment for attack had arrived, and he resolved to lose no time in making a bold and resolute attempt to gain the heart and hand of Lady Diana Hartland, and to rout Mrs. Bowyer Dawkins's forces completely. Perhaps, he might have been aided by a traitor within the fortress; a lurking attachment to Lord Templecombe may long have been concealed in the deepest recesses of Lady Diana's own heart. Certain it is, that the noble Viscount retired every evening to his peaceful couch at the "Bedford," sustained by a consciousness that he was slowly but surely gaining ground, and that if Mrs.

Dawkins's cold only kept her *hors de combat* for only a little while longer, the day and Lady Diana were his own.

At this juncture, Lord Templecombe was one afternoon riding slowly towards the Downs above the town, when he had the good fortune to see tearing full speed, down one of the roughest, steepest, narrowest, and most dangerous roads leading from that locality, a mail phaeton, driven by a lady. The horses had evidently taken fright, and were most decidedly running away. The groom, in standing up in the dickey to try to render his mistress some assistance, had been thrown out by a sudden jolt, and was lying on his back some yards behind, stunned and helpless. The lane, besides being narrow, was bounded on either side by a high bank with a hedge at the top of it; and Lord Templecombe perceived that by

leaping over the hedge, he could interpose an efficient barrier to the further progress of the terrified animals.

On seeing the obstacle which thus suddenly presented itself, in direct opposition to their mad career, the horses first reared violently, and then attempted to rush up the steep embankment at the side of the road; and by this means, they succeeded in overturning the carriage and themselves along with it. In a moment, Lord Templecombe was off his own horse and had flown to the assistance of Lady Diana, who was fortunately more frightened than hurt; and her groom having got up and shaken himself, found upon second thoughts, that he was not much the worse for his misadventure, and came running to inquire after the fate of his mistress. With the assistance of some farm labourers, who were working

in a field close by, the horses were extricated from their recumbent position, and the carriage was placed once more, in its proper equilibrium. The horses were found to be scratched and cut a little, but not seriously injured. The harness was patched together with string, and in this predicament Lady Diana, who had greatly relieved her feelings by sitting down on the bank and having a good cry, and was consequently in a most subdued and humiliated frame of mind, consented with great meekness to be driven home at a foot pace, by her "gallant preserver," who made the most of his opportunity, and succeeded without any very great difficulty in obtaining an admission from the vanquished amazon that she was quite ready to marry him, whenever Mrs. Dawkins gave her permission. Having gained this point, Lord Templecombe took the initi-

ative with a very high hand, and having professed his perfect willingness to cut himself into small pieces, if he could thereby serve in any degree the lady of his love, he proceeded to stipulate for the total expulsion from his house and hearth, of Mrs. Bowyer Dawkins. If Lady Diana intended to become Viscountess Templecombe, Mrs. Bowyer Dawkins must henceforward be a banished woman.

In vain, did Lady Diana represent in forcible language the many excellent qualities of her friend ; in vain, did she plead the poverty and lonely condition of that much-maligned woman.

Lord Templecombe was inexorable.

“ You can pension her off, Diana. Give her what you like ; settle a handsome annuity upon her, to-morrow, if you please ; but remember one thing—the first time that

friend of yours enters my doors, I walk out of them. You must choose between us two. You can not have us both. You may give me up, and keep Mrs. Bowyer Dawkins, if you think you would like that better. If not, you must let her go and trust to me. But *my* happiness will not be safe for a moment if it is to depend upon the tender mercies of that—well, for your sake, I will say—woman. Now, Diana, you know my firm determination, and you must make up your mind which of us you will live with, for the future.”

Lady Diana considered the matter for five whole minutes, at the expiration of which time she made a deliberate choice of Lord Templecombe ; and Mrs. Bowyer Dawkins's doom was sealed.

That lady received her *cong * the very next day, with an annuity of three hundred

pounds a-year, and shortly afterwards took up her abode in Paris, where she found a little congenial society, and where her previous history was very imperfectly known;—and Lady Diana Hartland became Viscountess Templecombe within the next six weeks.

CHAPTER X.

A COMMERCIAL CRISIS.

"The curse of gold upon the land,
The lack of bread enforces—
The rail-cars snort from strand to strand
Like more of death's white horses!
The rich preach rights and future days,
And hear no angel scoffing,
The poor die mute—with starving gaze
On corn ships in the offing."

MRS. BARRETT BROWNING.

THE time passed away heavily enough, till the days began to shorten and to grow dark and chilly, and we knew that winter was fast approaching ; but we heard nothing of

our little wanderer. John Beaumont and Honour Verney were married in November at Midsummer Verney. Mr. Auriol went down to assist in performing the ceremony, and Agnes was one of the bridesmaids. Margaret Beaumont was also there, and my brother Tom. They told me, that Lady Venetia Verney received them most graciously and expressed her regret that I was unable to be of the party. She had talked to Tom about Sydney, and appeared to be much distressed on learning that we had heard nothing of her. "I know, you think it is my fault," she told him, with a faint attempt at one of her old, seductive smiles. "You must all blame me for having made up the marriage, I mean. I am sure, I feel like a murderess, and shall never forgive myself as long as I live. But how could I have foretold that it would end so unfortunately?"

I shall never try my hand at match-making again, you may depend upon it."

Otherwise, Lady Venetia had been as agreeable and charming as ever, and was most thoughtful for the comfort of all her guests. Several young men were staying in the house, who seemed, Tom said, to be nearly as much devoted to her as Spencer had been, and she was always surrounded by a little circle of adorers who attended assiduously to all her wishes and requirements, and waited upon her hand and foot.

Margaret declared, she did not believe that Lady Venetia was so gay and lively in reality, as she appeared to be, when in company. She thought her high spirits unnatural and over-strained, and she fancied she was far from happy, though, whether her trouble was caused by remorse on Sydney's account, or whether she was fretting

for the loss of her cousin, Mr. Hamilton, it was impossible to guess. Sir Robert seemed to watch her anxiously at times, though he said nothing, and was generally engrossed in the deepest investigation of the little red boxes from his office. This at least was Margaret's report.

Before Christmas, the young Beaumonts were to take possession of the Manor House, and Margaret took great interest in all the preparations for their arrival. John had, hitherto, been the great object and interest of her life, and it must have been difficult to her, I think, to resign him to his young wife so cheerfully as she did. But Margaret was thoroughly unselfish and disinterested, and putting her own feelings entirely on one side, she was able to rejoice most cordially in her brother's happiness. I could not help feeling thankful all the

time, that my dear old Tom had never taken a fancy to marry anybody—and that I had not to take up my crutches and leave my old home, to seek for lodgings over some grocer's shop in Dumbleton. But Tom was not in the least inclined to part with me, and so I indulged myself in pitying Margaret to my heart's content.

It seemed so sad, to settle down for life in solitude and loneliness as one of the rank and file of Dumbleton old maids. She had, however, her old home to live in, and John insisted on her accepting from him a very handsome addition to her slender fortune, and she spent the greater portion of her time with John and Nora, though she never failed to come and sit with me for an hour, or two every day, and tried to cheer my despondency by every means in her power.

I could not at all, get over Sydney's loss. I felt sure she still lived, and that some day she would return to us, but the suspense and anxiety were very hard to bear. I had had so little trouble in my life, that this tried me very much, and I could not hold up against it, as perhaps I ought to have done. Poor Tom did his best to help me, but he was dreadfully cut up himself, and we were thankful when James and Eliza arrived from abroad.

James, like ourselves, was greatly distressed and bewildered about Sydney's fate ; but Eliza took quite the other line, and was only indignant. Sydney had brought disgrace, she declared, upon the whole family, and she would never receive her into her house, again. It was an unheard-of thing to run away in that kind of manner, because her husband did not make enough fuss about

her. It was her own fault entirely, for not managing him properly. Eliza had had two husbands, so she hoped she might be allowed to give an opinion upon the subject, and she was convinced, that if a woman could not prevent her husband from flirting with other people, she must be very much wanting in self-respect. She had no notion of permitting such nonsense. If we remembered, she had soon put a stop to James's fit of admiration for that wonderful woman—who had turned the heads of all the gentlemen in the parish—though Eliza could not conceive, for her part, what they saw in her. Lady Venetia had always been very good-natured and friendly to her, and would have been so to Sydney if she had behaved properly—there could be no doubt about that. And then what a position Sydney had thrown away. She might have been

quite a great lady by this time, if she had played her cards well ; and instead of that, the foolish girl was ruined and disgraced for life.

Certainly Eliza was a difficult woman to live with. It was no use arguing with her, and so I let her talk till she was tired, and tried not to listen. Nothing, it appeared, had displeased her more, than finding John Beaumont married to Miss Verney, and actually living next door to her. She had always intended the Manor House for Sydney, and her mortification at finding one of the Beaumont family in possession of it, was unbounded.

James, poor fellow ! looked worried almost beyond endurance sometimes, and I was glad when he could come in for a few minutes to talk quietly to Tom and me on his way from the station. He often found Margaret

with us, and I fancied, he sighed sometimes when she left the room, as if he were perfectly aware of the loss he had sustained. We were glad, however, in many ways that James had returned home, for this was a season of sad distress in the commercial world.

It was melancholy to me to watch the city men of business, coming from the station that winter. Such worn, haggard, anxious faces passed my windows, and most of my old friends seemed to avoid looking up at me. They had no longer the heart to nod and smile as they used to do.

Every day, great Joint Stock Companies came crashing down, one after the other, dragging into the vortex innumerable smaller firms, and banks, and houses of business.

Our Dumbleton people suffered considerably in the storm, and many of the richest

men on the Common were more, or less ruined.

Tom was very uneasy about many of his neighbours, and he told me in confidence that he had heard rather unpleasant reports about several of the companies with which James was connected.

In fact, these rumours proved to be only too true, and James found, to his cost, that things had been very much mismanaged during the last few months.

It soon became evident to both my brothers, that James would be liable for a great deal of the rash speculation and fraudulent management of his co-directors, who had taken advantage of his absence, to carry on business in a reckless, dangerous manner, to which they were very well aware James never would have consented, had he been consulted in the matter.

But the mischief was done, and done irreparably, and it was now too late for James to interfere. He had invested large sums of money in banks, railroads, and other public companies, which were now, it appeared entirely bankrupt; either from their connection with other failing houses, upon which their prosperity mainly depended, or by some gross carelessness, or fraudulence in the management of their own affairs. Except some shares in the "Proserpine Iron Works," James had lost almost everything that he had either made, or saved for himself. Some of Eliza's money was still secured to her, and most of Sydney's fortune had been so tied up by her marriage settlements that he had no power over it. But several thousands which had been previously invested in some of his favourite schemes, had gone in the general wreck.

My poor brother ! it was a sad end to all his fine hopes of making a fortune for his old age, and he felt it very bitterly. Contango Abbey was sold at once, by auction, with all the furniture and pictures which he and Eliza had taken so much pleasure in collecting together. James, however, was still determined not to leave Dumbleton. He seemed to cling to Tom and to me, as his best friends and comforters in his trouble, and indeed, I am sorry to say, Eliza was anything but a comfort to him. Eliza was only made for prosperity. She had been greatly disappointed at the result of Sydney's marriage ; she now felt equally indignant with her husband for having been ruined, and she never ceased to taunt him with being a bankrupt, and a beggar and a dependant on her bounty ; and finally, a very heartless, thankless, selfish wretch for not

showing her more affection and gratitude.

Poor, dear James ! He had altered very much of late years. At one time, his impetuous, irritable temper would have been stung by these reproaches, till he answered Eliza as harshly as she deserved. But his spirit seemed to be utterly broken, and he seldom spoke sharply to her now.

James reminded me of the saying, that even a hawk may be tamed by the perpetual noise of a sledge-hammer close to its ear. In my own mind, I always associated Eliza with the sledge-hammer. She had succeeded in taming James very effectually, but it brought tears into my eyes too, sometimes ; it is sad to see a man you have known in his quick-tempered, fiery youth become so patient and meek and worn-out as my poor brother James was.

Tom helped him through all his work, and persuaded him to interest himself a little in the Iron Works, which, thanks to John Beaumont's good management, were still as thriving as ever. John, to please his old friend, found him some situation connected with the Works, by which he could earn a few hundreds a year, without incurring any fresh responsibility ; and this incentive to action, and in a little degree, to independence also, did James more good than anything else in the world could have done. He and Eliza removed into a small, but pretty villa, near us, in which they might have been very happy, had not the demon of wounded vanity and discontent taken such complete possession of my sister-in-law, that she never could be anything but miserable, wherever she was.

"It was too bad of James," Eliza said,

“to fix upon a horrid, little house in Dumbleton, where they had always been such great people. She wondered he did not wish to hide his disgrace in some fresh place where nobody knew him! and then to go and take some miserable post under John Beaumont! If she had been a man, she would have had more spirit than to condescend to such a thing as that. Eliza called it insulting of Mr. Beaumont to think of offering her husband such a situation—as if her jointure (what was left of it) were not enough to keep him comfortably and respectably without his working in a subordinate place for a mere wretched pittance, and since she *had* married him,” Eliza said, “she was willing to support him. But he preferred to work like a galley-slave, for next to nothing, and she believed, if the truth were known, he was glad to make any pretence of having busi-

ness to do, that he might get away from her, but that was all the gratitude she had ever received from James."

James generally ended these agreeable conversations by coming to see us, or the Beaumonts, but it broke my heart to see him so altered and so patient. Heather Brae was, after all, a nice little place, and Eliza put into it as many of her pretty things as the house would hold, and kept her brougham with one horse still, but she declared that nothing should ever induce her to use it. She did not care to go out at all, now she had lost her barouche and her fine pair of carriage horses.

Mrs. Pybus, who prided herself on always speaking the truth, told me plainly that she considered James's wife as a thorn in his side, and that she thought it was a very proper judgment upon him, for jilting Mar-

garet Beaumont, and leaving his old father like the prodigal son in the parable, and going into a far country to seek his fortune ; but as poor James's career did not in any striking degree resemble that of the prodigal son, I failed to profit so much by the comparison as I might otherwise have done.

One strange discovery was made during the move from Contango Abbey. While opening some boxes that had long been laid by, in the lumber-room, Eliza found the white gown and bonnet that poor Sydney had concealed there, the evening she left Dumbleton, with the little box containing her wedding ring and other trinkets. This circumstance convinced us that she was living, and that her sudden disappearance had not been unpremeditated.

Tom at once communicated this fact to

Sir Robert, and John Beaumont undertook to write to Mr. Hamilton, and forward to him the rings and bracelets his wife had left behind her, he being evidently the lawful owner of the property. I never saw any one who improved more upon acquaintance than Mrs. John Beaumont. She soon lost all her shyness and reserve, and became exceedingly popular in Dumbleton. People had thought her haughty and proud as Miss Verney, but now she was certainly very much the reverse of that. It was impossible for anybody to be more kind-hearted and friendly than she was to us all; and even Eliza, with all her dislike of the whole Beaumont connection, could not help owning that Mrs. John Beaumont was a very superior person to the rest of the family, but thought she had made a shocking *més-alliance*, poor thing! in marrying "that

man," though of course that was no business of hers.

Sir Robert frequently came to the Manor when he was in London, and never failed to call on us and enquire if we had heard of Sydney. I ventured now and then, to ask after Mr. Hamilton, and could not but be pleased to hear that he was well and working hard at his post, which he seemed perfectly competent to fill. "I trust, if your niece should ever reappear, they may yet make up their dispute and be happy again together," when Sir Robert once said to me, "I can't help thinking the poor girl was hasty and ill-judged in leaving him. I should be glad if we could hear something of her, poor thing! but from what Venetia tells me, I fear she was a little in fault. Venetia assures me there was not the slightest foundation for her

jealousy. You will oblige me, Miss Lambert, by making this known to her friends. I am sincerely grieved for the unfortunate girl, but she was decidedly ill-advised, and must have been labouring under a complete misapprehension at the time. Lady Venetia assures me, she is convinced of it, and that woman—that Mrs. Bowyer Dawkins—I am afraid, must have made some mischief between Spencer and his wife. I never had any opinion of Mrs. Dawkins.” Good, honest, straightforward, old gentleman! I could not help respecting his evident desire to acquit his wife of all blame, so I looked convinced by his arguments, and said nothing.

CHAPTER XI.

MONA'S ISLE.

"Had I a heart for falsehood framed,
I ne'er could injure you ;
For though your tongue no promise claimed,
Your charms would make me true.
To you no soul shall bear deceit,
No stranger offer wrong,
But friends in all the aged you'll meet,
And lovers in the young."

R. B. SHERIDAN.

BUT all this time, perhaps you are wondering what had become of poor Sydney ; though *we* did not know till some time afterwards, I don't see, why I should not

tell you at once, and spare you some of the suspense that we went through.

We left her, if you remember rightly, on the deck of the "Mona's Isle," on her voyage from Liverpool to Douglas Harbour, dressed in widow's weeds, and looking remarkably pretty as well as touching and interesting in that attire ; so thought many of the passengers on board the "Mona's Isle," at all events ; and seeing so young a lady travelling alone, a good-natured old clergyman and his wife seated themselves near her, and entered into conversation with her.

"So you're going over to the Island?" said the old gentleman, by way of an introduction.

"Have you friends there, to meet you?" enquired the old lady.

"No," replied Sydney, "I know no one there."

"Ah! indeed! And what part are you going to, pray? Perhaps we can be of some use to you," added the gentleman.

"I really have not thought about that yet," said Sydney, hesitating; "I heard the Isle of Man was a nice, quiet place to live in and very cheap, so I thought I had better go there."

"Bless me!" ejaculated the old clergyman. "Mary, my dear, had not we better take charge of the young lady when she first lands. She will be quite lost in Douglas all alone."

"Douglas is not what I call a cheap place by any means, my dear young friend," said Mary, "and not very quiet either. There are a good many foreigners in the town at this time of year, and they make everything so dreadfully dear. I remember the time when ducks were twopence a-piece, but you can't

get them for that now, least of all in Douglas."

"If the lady does not care where she goes, she had better come with us to Peel. I am the Rev. Evan Christian, ma'am, one of the clergy of the Island, and if you like to take up your residence at Peel, in the first instance, I think you will find us very quiet people; and there is pretty scenery. Some prefer Ramsay. But I think, myself, there's nothing like Peel. Here's my wife here, much of the same opinion. Eh! Mary?—Mrs. Christian, my dear madam."

Sydney looked up at the good, kind, old faces, and determined to place herself under the protection of Mr. and Mrs. Christian forthwith.

"You are very kind," she said, "I think I should like very much to go to Peel. I have read about Peel in 'Peveril

of the Peak,' you know, and I suppose I could find a lodging there?"

"Oh! yes! never fear—we will see to all that. Don't you be uneasy, there are Mrs. Quiggin's rooms vacant, Mary, you know. A very nice, comfortable body she is; and we shall see you safely there, in our car. The car will come and meet us at Douglas; and we will have plenty of room for you in it."

"You are very, very kind," said Sydney, gratefully, but she was not sorry when they got well out to sea, and Mr. and Mrs. Christian retired to their berths, after vainly endeavouring to persuade her, to come below with them. Sydney sat alone on deck; her long crape veil hid her face, and nobody else, attempted to enter into conversation with her. Fortunately for her, she was never sea-sick, and the fresh sea air and complete

change of scene, braced her nerves and did her good. At length, the gun sounded from the bow of the steamer as she glided gently into Douglas Harbour, and the passengers ran up from below, looking sick and wretched, to scramble for their baggage. It was now getting late, and it was quite dusk. The two, good, old Christians came to look for Sydney, and asked her if she had much luggage.

“Only a carpet-bag,” she replied, “I I was not sure if I should stay here, so I did not bring more.”

“Well! then we can take that with us easily,” said the unsuspicious old gentleman. “Is there any name on it, my dear?”

“I think not. Oh! there are my initials on it, I believe—‘S. H.,’ Sarah Horton,” she added in a guilty voice.

With the help of porters, with lanthorns,

and a farming man—who came to meet his master and mistress—the luggage was all found at last, and deposited in Mr. Christian's "inside car," as he called a little black vehicle on two wheels, looking like something between a miniature omnibus and a hearse, and which was standing on the Quay, with a rough, raw-boned, old horse between its shafts.

"Here we are; come my dear, jump in," said the hospitable old gentleman. "You must sleep at our house to-night, and to-morrow we will take you to look for lodgings, if you please."

It was a long, dark, rough drive, and Sydney felt very tired, before she got to the end of it. She found it difficult to remember always to answer to the name of Mrs. Horton, and supposing her to be asleep, her companions presently ceased to point out to

her, through the darkness, the beauties of the island, and she was roused only when the inside car finally stopped with a sudden jerk at Mrs. Christian's door.

Overcome with fatigue, Sydney thankfully retired to the small, but neat guest-chamber into which Mrs. Christian ushered her, as soon as she had finished the frugal repast which had been prepared for the travellers by the little maid-of-all-work, who assisted good Mrs. Christian in her household duties.

It was late when Sydney awoke the next morning, and it was some time before she could recollect where she was, or what had happened to her.

Lady Venetia's *fête* seemed to her to have taken place hundreds of years ago, in some former phase of existence, and Sydney had some trouble to convince herself that only

two days had elapsed, since she sat in the great tent and had heard herself discussed by her husband and his cousin.

“Oh ! how am I ever to get through the rest of my long dreary life ?” she exclaimed at length, in despair. “I am so dreadfully young—not twenty yet ! and I don’t feel ill—I don’t suppose I am the least likely to die, sooner than other people. What a terrible, frightful time I have to look forward to. There are three hundred and sixty-five days in every year, and I have found two days so long ! It seems like eternity, to look forward to the time when I shall be old and likely to die. Will God be merciful to me, I wonder, and let me die before my time ! —That is all I have left to pray for, now.”

While she was thus meditating, the door of her room was gently opened, and Mrs. Christian put in her head :—

"Are you awake, my dear?—That is right. You were so tired, I would not call you sooner; and now, I shall just bring you up a cup of tea and a bit of toast. We have had our breakfast three hours ago, and Evan is out among his potatoes; so there's no need to hurry down. After dinner, we will go and look at Mrs. Quiggin's rooms."

"You are so kind to me," said Sydney, with a sigh. "I don't know how to thank you."

"Oh! don't think about that, my dear. We Manx people are glad to get a chance visitor from England, and you are full young to take care of yourself. Here comes Judy beg (that means little Judy, you know,) with the tray, and so you must eat a good breakfast. Here's an egg, too—one of my favourite, little hen's eggs. She is a real

Manx hen, with very short legs and no tail at all—our little ‘bunty’ hen, we call her. You shall see her by and bye. And now, before you get up, you must tell me how much you think you can afford to pay for your lodgings; because it will be of no use to trouble about looking at those that are not likely to suit you, you know; will it? How much do you generally pay a-week now for furnished apartments?”

Poor Sydney looked very much puzzled, I have no doubt, at this question.

“I hardly know,” she answered at length. “I have never lived in lodgings before. But I have got a hundred pounds by me, and I think another year, I may have more than that. Perhaps I can earn something here, by teaching? Would one hundred pounds last me for one year?”

“Bless you! yes, dear, and comfortably

too. Why that is more than Evan and I have between us. We have not above seventy pounds certain ; but we have this house and a few fields, and we manage to make ourselves very comfortable, you see. There's many of the clergy here, have large families to bring up on a hundred a year, and less than that. Yes, I think Mrs. Quiggin's would suit you very well. But, la ! my dear !" cried the old lady, suddenly starting back, with a face of horror ; " how's this ?"

" What is the matter, Mrs. Christian ? What is it ?" inquired Sydney, looking frightened.

" Your ring ! my dear ! You have no ring ! Oh, dear me ! I hope you have not lost your ring !" And for a moment, kind-hearted Mary Christian began to be afraid she and Evan had made a sad mistake.

" Oh !" said Sydney, looking at her hand.

"I remember now. In my great trouble and grief, I scarcely knew what I did, and I pulled my wedding ring off, with some others I had on, and I threw them all into a box together and locked them up. I never thought of it till now. That is unfortunate—but I could not bear the sight of it, somehow, and so I put it away, and I have left them all behind me. What can I do?"

Mrs. Christian pondered for a few minutes, and examined Sydney's face attentively.

"You look as if you were telling me the truth, my poor child. I hope you are, for your own sake."

"I am, indeed," said Sydney. "You may rely upon that."

"But how long have you lost your husband, my dear?" asked Mrs. Christian, doubtfully.

"Quite recently," replied Sydney, begin-

ning to wish she had never thought of her widow's dress. "Very, very, recently."

"And you have no friends—no relations to go to, poor soul?"

"My father died many years ago, in Australia," answered Sydney evasively. "My mother is married again, and she is now abroad with her husband. I have no uncles and aunts of my own—no relations at all in England, except my step-father's family. They are very kind people ; but I wanted to get away—I wanted to be quiet and alone—so I came here."

Mrs. Christian thought for a few moments and then disappeared.

Sydney felt like a wicked impostor, and feared the old lady had gone to denounce her to her husband ; but she soon returned, bringing in her hand a little thin, worn, gold ring.

"Here, my dear! This was my poor mother's wedding-ring; you shall wear it, if you like, till you get your boxes over from England. See! it will just fit you. That is fortunate! my mother had very little hands. You see, my dear, if you don't wear a ring at all, it will be sure to make people say things. People will talk so, about any stranger; it can't be helped, but it would be better to be on the safe side. You'll excuse me, I know, for mentioning it."

Sydney thanked and kissed the kind, old woman, with tears in her eyes.

"There! there! poor dear; now you will like to get up, I dare say, and dress yourself; and presently, if it would be a relief to your mind to tell me all about it, and what took him off at last, poor fellow! and the particulars of his last illness, and so

forth, you will find me below. I know it is a comfort, sometimes, to pour out all one's heart to a friend. I love to hear of these kind of things, so you will find me always ready to listen and sympathise with you, and I have six, blessed, little angels in Heaven, myself. It may do your heart good to hear of them, in return."

Sydney was rather alarmed at the prospect of having to reproduce a death-bed scene, for Mrs. Christian's edification, but she found her task less difficult than she expected, for when she went down stairs, her kind hostess was busy, superintending the culinary department, and then Sydney escaped by saying, that the subject was so painful to her, that she could not bear to recal it, but she should derive great consolation from hearing the history of the six blessed angels; and by the time the first

two angels were despatched, Mr. Christian himself came in, and the dinner was ready, and after that, they all three sallied forth in search of lodgings for Sydney.

Mrs. Quiggin resided in a little row of tidy cottages, facing the sea, and called Fenella Villas. She had two rooms to let; a bed-room and sitting-room, plainly, but comfortably furnished, and in a very quiet and pleasant situation. The rent was moderate, and Sydney was not difficult to please, and so the preliminaries were soon settled, and Mrs. Christian, who was evidently somewhat shocked at the scanty amount of baggage which Sydney had brought with her, talked importantly of the boxes which were to follow, as soon as she was settled, so as to give Mrs. Quiggin an idea of the wealth and importance of her lodger. She next suggested that she should

show Mrs. Horton the best shops, and assist her in laying in her stores of tea, sugar, etc., for the morrow ; and then, if Sydney wished it, Mrs. Christian offered to take her across the harbour, to the little Island, with its ancient, round towers and ruined cathedral, from which Peel derives its chief notoriety.

But Sydney had no heart, at that moment, for sight-seeing, and she longed to be alone and to be quiet ; so, much to the astonishment and mortification of her good old friend, she begged to be excused any further exertion for that day.

“Don’t you think the tradespeople would send the things, to me ?” she asked, “I am so very tired ; I am sure Mrs. Quiggin would tell somebody to send me some tea and things.”

“Ah ! my dear ! I can see you are not much of a manager,” ejaculated Mrs. Chris-

tian, in a tone of deep concern. "There ! there ! never mind, it can't be helped ; leave it all to me—I shall go round to my own tradespeople, and tell them to send in whatever I think is necessary for you. Mrs. Quiggin is an honest woman ; a worthy woman, no doubt, but don't try her too far ; there are bounds to the virtue, even of Manx landladies : and so, now, I shall bid you good-bye, my dear. If ever I can be of any use to you, send for me at any moment, without hesitation ; it will be a pleasure to me to come and look after you a little ; no, don't thank me, pray—I assure you, I quite enjoy it. It makes a pleasant little change for me."

CHAPTER XII.

THE "EAIL VARREY."

"God sent his singers upon earth,
With songs of sadness and of mirth,
That they might touch the hearts of men,
And bring them back to Heaven again."

LONGFELLOW.

SYDNEY was thankful when her garrulous old friend took her final departure, and she was left to the undisturbed possession of her new home.

It was not much like anything she had ever seen before, except in an occasional visit to Mrs. Roberts, or Miss Wyburd.

The room was small and low, but looked bright and cheerful now, with the afternoon sun full upon it.

A little, green sofa stood against the wall, and over it, hung a print of good, old Bishop Wilson, in full canonicals, full-bottomed wig and all. In the centre of the room stood a shiny, round table, with a red cover on it, which being much too small for the purpose, came sliding off, whenever anybody went near it, as if by some wonderful magnetic attraction.

An immense, old-fashioned arm-chair, with broken springs, occupied the whole of the space between the fire-place and the window, and a row of small, cane chairs stood facing the fire, with their backs to the wall, in stiff formality. A little papier-maché table painted with a bunch of gigantic roses and convolvuluses in gaudy colours

was placed in the window, and veiled from the gaze of the profane, by an elaborate square of crochet-work, which would probably have slipped off, as often as its companion on the centre table, had it not been forcibly restrained by a large, family bible, which was the pride of Mrs. Quiggin's life, and which had been presented to her on her marriage, by her former mistress, the arch-deacon's lady.

This was Sydney's future home! and as she looked round the little room, and compared it to the lost glories of Contango Abbey, her heart sank within her. Here she was, she thought, settled down in this little, unknown island, without a single thing to hope for, or to look forward to, for the rest of her life. Nobody would ever think of seeking her there—indeed, she doubted if they would ever try to find her at all.

They must all have made up their minds by this time, that she was dead. Aunt Patty, she believed, would be sorry to lose her, and her mother and step-father would be greatly shocked to hear of it, when they returned home. Uncle Tom had always been fond of her. He would miss her a little, perhaps; and Sydney thought, that even Sir Robert would regret her. He would probably say,—"Ah! poor thing! it is a pity nobody happened to look round for her, before they left the tent. She might have been saved so easily."

But for the rest—"Oh!" thought Sydney, "*they* will only be glad. I know they will, in their hearts. I shall be out of their way now. They will be happy together, one of these days, and I will never interfere with them. Let them be happy in their own way. It is better, after all, to be here, far

away out of their sight. I cannot watch them now—I shall not be able to hear them talk about me, again. But, oh! it *is* hard! it is very hard, to have had him for my own, once, and to have lost him for ever—to have given him up to her, in fact. *She* is the person to blame. She knew, that when I was once his wife, she had no right to Spencer. He was mine then, not hers. Had I been in her place, and she in mine, I could not so have wronged her. And yet, after all, things might have been worse. I might have lived and died, and never have seen Spencer!—never have loved him. Ah! How much rather I would be as I am, at this moment, than never have known Spencer at all. I may be neglected, forsaken, lonely, but he is my husband still. I have loved him—nay! I *do* love him, in spite of all that has passed. Miserable as I have been,

I would go through it all again, for the sake of those few, short, happy weeks we had at Midsummer Verney. I have paid dearly for it, but it was worth all I have suffered since, and I may remember that happiness without shame. I may love him still, for I am his wife, and it is my duty to love him. There is no sin in that. *She* cannot say this, as I can. After all, I am the happier of the two. There can be no doubt about the matter. I would not change places with her, even now—for all the world. Perhaps some day, he may yet come back to me—and if he does, he shall find that I am not so weak, and foolish, and helpless, as he suspects me to be. I will be brave and strong, and I will learn how to take care of myself. The right is on my side—and as that man Redfern said, in his speech, 'may God defend the right!' And now, what

shall I do? I must earn some money first. I am sure I could teach some little girls—quite little things. It would fill up my time, and make my money last a little longer. I must get my dear, unsuspecting old friends to recommend me to some of the farmers and tradespeople about here. I am sure, I could teach music, and French, and drawing; but I don't know about arithmetic, or work. Reading and writing, of course, would come of themselves, somehow, I suppose. Yes! that is a fine idea. I dare say, there are not many English teachers here, and they will think me rather a good governess than otherwise. And about my boxes. I see it is expected that I should have a large amount of luggage. I must drive over to some town and buy some clothes, just to satisfy them, and then a ring, to replace kind Mrs. Christian's. That is well thought of. Ah!

I shall learn to be quite a clever woman in time ; but it is too late now, and I may as well be the fool they think me, for any good it will do me."

In a few days, Sydney ordered a car, and announced early one morning, that she was going to Douglas to fetch her boxes, and begged Mrs. Quiggin would mention this to Mrs. Christian if she happened to call. She was glad to get off safely, without meeting either of her friends, for she felt convinced they would instantly have offered to accompany her, and have ruined all her plans. On arriving at Douglas, she first went in search of some trunks and boxes, and choosing two, had them directed to Mrs. Horton, Peel. She next bought a requisite amount of ready-made linen, some black stuff, and another widow's cap, or two. The people of the shop kindly packed her goods care-

fully in her new boxes, and lastly, she went to buy her wedding ring.

The man looked so surprised at a widow in deep weeds, asking for a wedding-ring, that she thought it necessary to explain to him that her own was very thin and worn. This, from so very young a widow, made the man stare more than ever, and Sydney was quite thankful to escape from the shop with the ring on her finger, feeling very guilty, and almost expecting some one to tap her on the shoulder, and charge her with being a swindler.

Sydney returned to Fenella Villa during the dinner hour of the Christians, and when this worthy old couple called upon her, later in the afternoon, her clothes were safely deposited in the drawers, her boxes were concealed in Mrs. Quiggin's empty attic, and the wedding-ring of Mrs. Christian's

mother, was all ready to be returned to her with many thanks. She also unfolded to her friends her project of keeping a little day school for a few children of the middle class, and was delighted to find that the Christians highly approved of the plan, and undertook to provide her with several pupils as soon as she was ready for them. Sydney however, was, she found, in sad disgrace for having gone off to Douglas by herself. "Why did not you mention it, my dear? Evan would have been so pleased to have driven you over any day, to get your boxes," said Mrs. Christian.

"In fact, I wanted to go there myself, this week," added Mr. Christian, "and I should have been quite glad to have taken you. It was too bad of you, Mrs. Horton, to play us such a trick as this. Never you do it again, mind you, or we shall quarrel."

“That we shall ; and remember, too, if you please, that your money won’t last you long at this rate, Mrs. Horton,” said prudent Mrs. Christian. “It will never do for you to be paying for flies to go over to Douglas, when we have nothing to do but to take you in our car, whenever you want a lift into town.”

With the help of the Christians, Sydney soon obtained half-a-dozen little scholars, children of the shopkeepers and farmers around her ; and though she would have been far happier, sitting still and brooding over her own troubles, it was, in fact, the best thing that she could possibly have done. The little girls interested her, and occupied her whole time and thoughts, and Sydney found that she had a decided talent for teaching. She even contrived, with the help of a book, to teach her pupils arithmetic. The mothers

were so well pleased with their children's progress, that they sent her many little presents, and even invited her to tea constantly, though Mrs. Horton made an excuse of her deep mourning, to go nowhere, but to the Christians. A great feeling of sympathy was excited for the poor, friendless young widow, who had evidently seen better days, and who was so modest and unassuming in her manners; and Sydney met with kindness and respect from every one about her. And so the winter wore away, and nothing very notable happened except a storm, or two, and occasional disasters at sea, to the fishing boats and coasting vessels of the little port. Sydney's health, however, was far from strong, and by the time her little pupils left her, to keep their Christmas holidays, she was no longer able to conceal from herself, that an event

was likely to take place in the spring, which might increase the difficulties of her situation very considerably, not only, by adding to her expenses, but also, by calling attention to her lonely and deserted condition. Much embarrassed by this consciousness, Sydney rather shrank from confiding in her kind, old friend Mrs. Christian. But though a source of great anxiety to her, she felt at the same time great happiness, in the possession of her secret. She would henceforth not be quite alone in the world.

She could now look forward to something to love, something to hope for and work for, something which, would be her very own, and her right to which, as long as she preserved her own secret, nobody could possibly dispute. But sometimes, the anxiety predominated over the happiness. She was earning very little—scarcely anything, in-

deed, by her teaching; her health might soon fail altogether, and she could then earn nothing at all. If she drew more of her money from the London bank, her hiding-place might be revealed, and her husband could, if Miss Wolff were right in her assertions, claim both herself and her baby for his own private property. This was a terrible thought, and Sydney often became much depressed and perturbed in mind. Mrs. Christian, who at present suspected nothing, tried in vain to keep up her spirits; and on Christmas-eve she persuaded Sydney, by way of a little dissipation, to accompany her to the old Manx festival of the "Eail Varrey," (or Mary's-eve).

According to the ancient and primitive custom of the island, the people flocked to church that evening, bearing in their hands candles,

with which to illuminate the sacred edifice, which was already decorated with evergreens for the occasion. Each family rested their candlesticks on the ledge of the pew before them, and the evening service was read by Mr. Christian, followed by a short, simple sermon, and then the real business of the evening commenced. One member of the congregation after another, got up and volunteered a Christmas carol, either in Manx, or English, according to his own fancy, the whole congregation repeating the last line of each verse in chorus. As some of these carols consisted of between twenty and thirty verses, the ceremony was a lengthy one, and the candlesticks had to be replenished several times in the course of the evening, and the congregation did not disperse till a late hour.

The words of these carols were exceedingly

simple and homely. So much so, that poor desolate Sydney, was touched to the heart by them, and could hardly restrain herself from sobbing aloud ; they came so home to her own, sad state. One began thus :—

“ All you that are to mirth inclined,
Consider well and bear in mind,
What our great God for us has done,
In sending His beloved Son.

“ The five-and-twentieth of December,
Great cause have we, for to remember,
In Bethlehem, upon that morn,
There was the Blest Messiah born.

“ The night before that happy tide,
The spotless Virgin and her guide
Were long time wandering up and down
To find a lodging in the town.

“ But mark how all things come to pass,
Each Inn and lodging so full was,
That they could find no room at all,
But in a silly oxen's stall.

CHAPTER XIII.

FOUND !

“The fair and debonaire, that now so lowly lies,
The light upon her yellow hair, but not within her eyes,
The life still there, upon her hair, the death upon her eyes.”

It was, as far as I can recollect, one day early in March, when Tom brought from London, the news that Lord Osterley had been thrown from his horse at a steeple-chase, and was so seriously injured, that there was but little hope of his recovery. Lady Venetia and Lady Templecombe had gone

to nurse their only surviving brother, Tom said, and Sir Robert had sent for Mr. Hamilton, who was now Lord Osterley's heir-at-law, and his nearest male relative—two, or three of Lady Venetia's brothers having died in infancy.

Before, however, Spencer could arrive in England, his cousin was dead and buried, and he had only to succeed to his title and estates. As soon as the press of business would allow him, Mr. Hamilton came down to Dumbleton to see us, and I was much pleased with the regret he seemed to feel, at learning that we had heard no more of Sydney. "I shall," he added, "now be on the spot, and I am determined not to rest till the mystery is solved. Sydney shall be found if she is above ground, and you may depend upon it, Miss Lambert, I shall spare no effort to induce her to forgive all that

has passed, and let me try to make her future life a happy one. As for any fear of my relapsing into my old folly," he said frankly, though with a shade of embarrassment, "you need have no uneasiness, I assure you. I saw and heard enough, before I left England, to convince me, that I have been a mere dupe. I served as a plaything for the amusement of an idle, fine lady—that was all! I am wiser by this time, and I think I have now had a lesson, which will last me for life. If I could only find my poor, pretty little wife, and could persuade her to come back to me, I should indeed be fortunate. Her happiness would then, be my first object. Tell me you believe this, Miss Lambert. I know you love Sydney, and it would be a comfort to me to know, that I have not utterly forfeited your good opinion."

Now, I always had liked Mr. Spencer

Hamilton, I am ashamed to say, ever since the day he fed my old Jenny with a *Gloire de Dijon* rose, and though of course, I had been dreadfully angry with him for not appreciating Sydney as he ought to have done, still, I could not help feeling all the time, that he was "more sinned against than sinning," and I believed that if he had been left alone with his young wife, and they had had a fair chance of understanding each other, the marriage might have proved a happy one. So, as you may suppose, I was not very hard-hearted now, but assured Spencer that I gave him credit for the best possible intentions, and wished him every success in his endeavours to find Sydney, and to gain her pardon. At the same time, I recommended him to see as little of Lady Venetia as possible, and to refrain from any approach to a renewal of even

a harmless flirtation with that fascinating lady.

“You may trust me for that, Miss Lambert,” he replied. “If no other consideration had weight with me, I could not be so ungrateful to my true and generous friend, Sir Robert Verney, as to cause him henceforth, a moment’s uneasiness. I am armed, you see, on all sides, and I believe, I am proof against all my cousin’s wiles and coquetries for the rest of my life. After all, we might have been happy together had she been a little less selfish and worldly. I would gladly, at one time, have waited for her, any number of years ; and now perhaps, as things have turned out, we might have married at last. But Venetia chose her own lot in life. She threw me over, for the sake of making a good marriage, and acted as she thought with prudence and

discretion. If she is not happy, is it my fault? But I am at last freed from my bondage to her. I have seen how false and heartless she really is, and I am no longer at her command. She knows it, and is not pleased. Poor Via! I can see that; but I have no doubt, she will soon find another slave who will suit her purpose equally well, I am now only anxious to make reparation to my wife. I must and will find her—and that before long.”

From the Red Holm, Lord Osterley went to my brother James’s villa, and entreated him to make use of his step-daughter’s money which was now lying idle and unclaimed. “If I find her, as I hope soon to do, I shall have enough for us both,” persisted Spencer; but James was firm and could not be induced to touch a farthing that he had not earned himself. Eliza was delighted

to see her son-in-law, particularly now that he was a peer of the realm, and she did not know how to make enough of him. She abused Sydney for her folly in unmeasured terms, which, however, did not, I fancy, please his Lordship much ; for I heard, he stopped Eliza at once, by saying that Sydney was perfectly justified in the step she had taken. She had been mistaken indeed, he believed, and had been misled by foolish and mischievous reports, which were either entirely without foundation, or had been grossly exaggerated ; but believing, what no doubt, she had believed, he only respected Sydney's conduct, as much as he deplored her loss, and he begged Eliza would never again, find fault with her, in his presence.

Still, nothing could be heard of Sydney, and it was like an electric shock to me, when about two months after Spencer's first

visit to me, I opened a letter in an unknown hand, and with the Manx post mark on it—

It ran as follows :—

“ Fenella Villa, Peel,

“ Isle of Man.

“ DEAR MADAM,

“ I am aware, that I am taking a great liberty in thus addressing you, but I am at this moment, in some doubt and difficulty how to act, on behalf of a young lady, who is, I believe, not unknown to you : Mrs. Horton, (as she calls herself, though I have reason to believe that the name is an assumed one) is now lying at the point of death, and I have, with considerable difficulty, succeeded in persuading her to permit me, to write to some of her friends. She is hardly able to articulate distinctly, but whispered to me the words, ‘ Write to Miss Lambert, Dumbleton.’

“ Mrs. Horton has, she informs me, no near relative, except her mother, who has married again, and who is now, she believes, residing abroad. She appears to have some objection to letting any of her step-father’s family know where she is ; and of her late husband’s family, I can gain from her, no clue whatever. I cannot help fearing her married life has not been a happy one. But it is only right that you should know, that she is now here, carefully tended, indeed, but amongst comparative strangers, and almost in need of the actual necessities of life. If, (as I imagine,) her relations are in a good position in life, they will not, I am sure, hesitate to come to her and relieve her mind, at all events, from pecuniary cares, which have lately, I fear, weighed rather heavily upon her. I forgot to mention, that Mrs. Horton has lately been confined—her little boy is a

fine, healthy child, likely to live and do well. I sincerely trust, his sweet mother may yet be spared to him, but alas ! she seems sadly delicate, and we are labouring under great anxiety on her account. If our worst fears should unfortunately be realized, we shall be at a loss what to do with the poor child—our means being limited, and our station comparatively lowly. Still, we will never desert the dear infant, and should you not deem it expedient to come to us, or even to contribute towards his support, you may rely upon it, that we shall not desert the fatherless little one, who has been sent us, perhaps, by the good God, to take the place of our own, lost darlings ; and we shall bring him up as if he were, indeed, our child.

“ I remain, Madam,

“ Your obedient, humble servant,

“ MARY CHRISTIAN.

“P.S.—I should add, that my husband, (the Reverend Evan Christian), has already baptized the child, at his mother’s desire, by the name of Spencer—the name, I presume, of the late, lamented Mr. Horton.”

I was, of course, strangely excited at this news. I went to Tom’s office, as quickly as my infirmities would allow me, and showed him the letter. He started off at once, first to James, and then to Lord Osterley, who was in London at the time, while I made preparations for an immediate journey to the Isle of Man. My poor darling, with a baby! dying, perhaps, and in want of the necessaries of life—it was too horrible. My old maid was as eager to be off as I was myself, and not knowing what wild kind of place the Isle of Man might be, we packed a hamper with all the good things

we could collect together, on so short a notice. I sent for a fly, and drove to London with James and old Nancy, and we took Tom's luggage with us. Eliza declined going; she had no patience with Sydney, and she did not see the use of rushing off and crossing the sea on a wild goose chase like this. She dared to say, it was not Sydney at all, but a story vamped up for the occasion by some swindler, or another—it would be high time for her to go, when she heard the real truth of the matter. I did not press her to accompany us, and we drove off without her, to meet Tom at Euston Square.

I was delighted, however, when we got there, to see Lord Osterley waiting impatiently for us, at the entrance door, and to find that he intended to be of the party.

Tom had got an invalid-carriage all ready

for me, so that the journey did not fatigue me so much as might have been expected ; and when we reached Liverpool, I was quietly settled in the ladies' cabin, before the bustle of starting began.

In course of time, we arrived safely in Douglas harbour, and Lord Osterley sent his servant on shore at once, to secure a comfortable conveyance to Peel.

We had travelled all night, and it was a lovely Spring morning when we reached Fenella villa. Kind Mrs. Christian ran out to meet us, and naturally looked much surprised at the arrival of so large a party, and could not at first, be made to understand who we all were. She forbade the gentlemen any admittance to Sydney's room for the present, but Nancy and I, were allowed to go up and peep at the poor darling.

She was lying in her bed, with her baby

beside her, and looked terribly pale and feeble, but she stretched out her arms to me, and said in a faint voice—

“ Dear Aunt Patty ! I knew you would come to me ; here is my little baby—if I don’t get better soon, you must take care of him for me, and tell him, (Spencer, I mean,) that I have been very unhappy, very miserable. I hope he forgives me, if I have done him any wrong, as I too forgive him, for all he has made me suffer—everything, tell him ; everything—and I leave him my boy as a sign of it ; only, while he is very little, I hope you may be allowed to keep him ; his name is Spencer. I don’t think I shall live ; but tell Spencer (the other Spencer,) that I have always loved him, and that I have loved him to the last, in spite of all that has happened, though I know, now, that he has never loved me ; good-bye, dear Aunt Patty, thank Mrs.

Christian for me ; I cannot thank her for myself, I am so weak. Now I have seen you, and given you my precious child, I shall die very happy—it is the best thing for me, perhaps—” and, shutting her eyes, Sydney’s head fell back on the pillow, and I thought she was gone—she looked so still and death-like. But she had only fainted ; Mrs. Christian said, she was subject to long fits of faintness, and the agitation of seeing me had been too much for her. I therefore consented to leave Sydney for the present, to her care and Mrs. Quiggin’s ; but I made Nancy carry down stairs, the beautiful baby, that I might have the pleasure of introducing him to his father.

Spencer appeared to be much touched at the sight of his little son, and took the child, who was in a sweet slumber, from Nancy’s arms, and kissed him tenderly,

(which really, I thought, was as much as could be expected from the young man, all things considered).

This parental effusion, however, woke the infant, who looked up, smiling, in Spencer's face, and clutched at his long, black beard with its tiny, pink fingers, and when I took the boy from his father's arms, I saw a tear on his little round forehead, which could scarcely have fallen from his own bright eyes.

Sydney's message may have had something to do with it, perhaps, for though Spencer received it from me in total silence, I saw, he was unable to make any reply. Indeed, I could have taken no answer back to her. The doctor, to whom we were obliged to confide the state of the case, told us he could not answer for the consequences, if Sydney were the least excited or agitated.

She must not know that her husband was so near her, he said. She had a great deal of fever—it was now passing off, but her strength was utterly prostrated by it, and the slightest relapse, would inevitably prove fatal to her.

Tom and James both went in, to give her a kiss before they returned to England, leaving me behind with old Nancy; but Sydney had no idea that Spencer also remained at Peel, watching and waiting till she should be sufficiently strong to see him, and assure him, with her own lips, of her entire forgiveness, and thereby effect an opening for a complete reconciliation, upon which, Lord Osterley confided to me, he was fully bent. Nothing short of this, would at all satisfy his requirements.

A house was taken by Spencer, a little out of the town, to which we hoped shortly

to remove Sydney, and he passed most of his time in fitting this up with every comfort that money could procure.

A yacht belonging to the late Lord Osterley, was ordered to make for Peel Harbour, without further loss of time, and in this vessel, Spencer sailed backwards and forwards to Liverpool constantly, to purchase sofas, arm-chairs, a comfortable little carriage, and a vast store of Lilliputian finery for the better adornment of Lord Isleworth's very small person.

Poor Mrs. Christian's wonder and bewilderment were really quite diverting, and you may be sure, that she and her worthy husband were by no means neglected in the fray.

CHAPTER XIV.

RECONCILIATION.

"Bid me to live, and I will live
Thy protestant to be;
Or bid me love, and I will give
A loving heart to thee.

"Thou art my life, my love, my heart,
The very eyes of me;
And hast command of every part,
To live and die for thee."

HERRICK.

SEVERAL weeks elapsed, and Sydney's state of health was still so delicate, that it was only very gradually that I ventured to break to her, that her husband was in the neigh-

bourhood, and that he was anxious to see her as soon as she felt equal to a visitor. He would not come, till she sent him word that she really wished to see him.

“Oh! Aunt Patty, does Spencer really wish to see *me*?” she asked, doubtfully: “I am afraid it is only that he wants to have my baby—he has a right to it, you know, Aunt Patty, Miss Wolff said so; and oh! what should I do without my boy—my own darling, beautiful child? It will kill me, Aunt Patty, I feel it will; but, of course, if Spencer wishes to have him, I must submit. He can do what he likes, with his son and heir, but I shall not live long, after they have taken him from me.”

“You foolish girl,” I said, laughing at her fears; “Spencer does not mean to deprive you of your child. He only wants you to go back and live with him, and take

baby with you. I have not been able to tell you about it before—but Spencer is now the Earl of Osterley. His cousin is dead, and Spencer is to live at Osterley Hall, and he hopes you will go there, with him, and take little Lord Isleworth with you. I am sure, dear, you would be happy if you did. I believe, you might safely trust Spencer now. Indeed I do. He and I, have talked matters over a great deal, since we came here. You have no idea how fond he is of baby.”

“But—but,” faltered Sydney, “Lady Venetia!—she is so clever and so beautiful, and he cannot help liking her, you know; and though I might try with all my heart not to mind about it, Aunt Patty, I cannot help feeling it. I dare say, I am only jealous and silly; but it is very dreadful to think that Spencer—(I can’t call him Lord Osterley)—does not like me best.”

“But I think, he will like you best, in future, Sydney. I would not deceive you for the world—you know I would not. He certainly did admire Lady Venetia at the time he married you, which was very wrong of him, and a great pity ; but I honestly believe that he admires her no longer. I think he has found out, that she was only a vain, selfish woman, and that his wife is worth twenty of her. Won’t you see him, and let him tell you so, himself?”

“Well, Aunt Patty, I should like to hear him say so ; but will it last ? Will he say so, if he sees more of her ?—and I am only very foolish and childish still, I know ; but I am trying to learn to be sensible. Don’t you think, Aunt Patty, I managed to take care of myself, better than you would have expected ?”

I kissed the poor, little thing, and praised

her and encouraged her, and then went to find Lord Osterley, and sent him up, to fight his own battle.

It was very long before he came down stairs again; so long, that I became uneasy about my darling, and went to see if she were talking too much. Spencer held up his finger to me as I opened the door, as a signal for silence.

Sydney exhausted by fatigue, had fallen asleep on her sofa by the window, with her head resting on her husband's shoulder, while his strong arm supported her slender frame in an easy position; his other hand was clasped between her thin, white fingers, and a peaceful, happy smile illumined her features. But my entrance roused her, and she soon opened her eyes.

"Aunt Patty, is that you?" she said.
"Oh! I have had such a happy dream. I

thought Spencer had come back, and that he really did love me, after all."

"And so he has—and so he really does," cried Lord Osterley, pressing her to his heart and kissing her passionately. "It is no dream, my little wife; it is all true. Look at me, and now tell me—what am I to do? Must I leave you here, still, with baby?—or will you both come and live at Osterley, with me. Can you trust me, Sydney? Will you believe me, when I tell you, that I am an altered man. I know now, that I have been a very weak man, and a very foolish man. Like the poor dog in the fable, I have been throwing away the substance and trying to pick up the shadow. I was a fool, or a madman at the time, or I could not have let my pretty, young wife go, for the sake of that heartless woman; but I could not help myself, any more than any other wretched

maniac can stop himself in the midst of his attacks of frenzy. I have come to my senses at last, and see matters quite in another light, and I believe, you need not be the least afraid of my having a relapse, Sydney. I am in my right mind, now. Will you send me away, 'alone, a banished man?' or will you come home with me, and teach me to be good and happy at Osterley, and let me have the boy to play with and keep me out of mischief? Which?"

"Oh! Spencer! We will come with you. We will both come, and I don't mean to be afraid again. I feel so safe now. We will ask Lady Venetia to come and see us sometimes. Shall we? I think she won't try to take you away from me, again. She must see that it was not quite right of her, and that it did not make her happy either. I shan't mind, now, how often she comes. Perhaps,

if I had been wiser and more patient, and had stayed at home, instead of running away when I did—things might have turned out better, long before this. Do you think so, Spencer?"

"I can't say—we won't think of that,—I only know, that I have got my own silly, little wife back again, and that whatever I may have done then, I love her very dearly now. I believe I always did love you, really, Sydney, all the time, only I did not know it. I was miserable when you were lost, was I not, Aunt Patty? You can bear witness to that."

"I must send you away now, Spencer," I replied severely; "we shall have Sydney ill again, after all this excitement. Come, leave her to me for a little while, and go and take a ride."

"I am such an excellent nurse, Miss

Lambert. You don't know how useful I can be, in taking care of invalids ; and Sydney would rather I stayed with her, would not you, child ?”

“Ah ! yes ! of course I would ; but don't you want to go out, Spencer ?”

“No, I want to stay here and look at you. How very pretty you are, Lady Osterley ! But you are a little too pale. When will you come out driving with me ?”

I left the two, happy, young creatures together, and wrote a long letter to dear old Tom, and from that hour, Sydney improved as if by magic. In a few more days she was able to be removed to the new house, and to sit in the garden, and to drive every day. Spencer was the most attentive of nurses, and Sydney the most docile of convalescents. In short, it is impossible to conceive a more happy couple than the

Osterleys were. I left them a good deal alone together, but I accepted their offer of staying on with them, as I still felt anxious about Sydney's health, and I could not bear to lose sight of her altogether, at present ; but I did not attempt to join them in all their little expeditions by sea and land, though they came back raving about the beautiful bright water, which was so clear that they could see the red and green weeds growing up from the bottom of the sea, and the star-fish, and the crabs on the rocks below them ; so transparent that they hunted the fish as they swam to and fro, under the bows of their boats, though Sydney would not let the men strike at them with their harpoons as they wished to do. Then they went into deep, sea caves, where the anemones hung like jewels on the wet, brown rocks, and the water was sapphire blue and emerald green,

and the waves boomed against the sides and down into the recesses of the caverns, far away out of sight, like distant thunder.

Inland, they discovered wild, romantic glens, with rough roads, winding along beside rapid, mountain streams, and they climbed up the hill sides and brought me home rare plants; the curious little sundew, the lovely exotic-looking bog-bean, and the handsome *Osmunda Regalis*, with its golden spikes and bright, green leaves. Once, Sydney persuaded me to go and eat my luncheon in a damp glen, full of treacherous, green swamps, where there was a waterfall, and a stream, and a bridge, and some great, grey rocks, and a view of the sea, with the mountains of the Morne in the far horizon, but I only caught cold, and felt rheumatic for three days afterwards, and so, I declined going with them, a second time.

The Osterleys, however, would sometimes spend whole days on the little island covered with ruins, which is commonly called Holme Peel. Here, seated on the soft, green turf, mingled with wild thyme and moss, Sydney and Spencer became better acquainted with each other, than they had ever been before. Under the shadow of the old, round, tower of crumbling, red sandstone Sydney remained for hours, with her baby in her arms and her husband at her side, while they talked over the mistakes of the past and the happy promises of the future. Beneath their feet, lay the dark dungeon where the noble witch, Dame Eleanor Cobham, sighed away her doleful life, but neither her troubled spirit, (which is still supposed to haunt the place), nor yet, the still more terrible apparition of the black hound, or "Moddey dhoo," had power to

alarm the happy Sydney. Ghosts and spectres fled at the sound of her merry laugh as she listened to the story of Peveril and Fenella, which Spencer thought it his bounden duty to read aloud to her, on the very spot, where the scene is laid.

It was like a new honey-moon to them, Sydney told me, only so very, very much pleasanter and happier than the first one, and there was the baby now, to play with, which was certainly an immense advantage.

We stayed in this quiet, little island, most of the summer, and then we all returned to England together. The Osterleys went, for the autumn, to their own place, near the New Forest, while I came back to Dumbleton, to see my poor Tom, who had been very much lost without me. It was so rare a thing for me to go away from home, that I found myself quite

a person of importance, when I got home. Everybody was anxious to hear my adventures, and you may be sure, there was a good deal of curiosity rife in the place, about both Lord and Lady Osterley. I had enough to do to satisfy all my visitors ; but I had been absent so long, that I found I had to listen as well as to talk. Quite a budget of news awaited me.

The great event of the day was, that Lord Cleveden had given a very excellent living, which had lately fallen vacant, to Mr. Broke—and Selina was much elated at the prospect of being “ really, rather rich,” and having a brougham and keeping a full-grown footman.

At Mr. Berresford Broke’s request, the living of Dumbleton was offered to his curate, Mr. Hatfield, who thereupon determined to marry Agnes Auriol immedi-

ately, much to the disgust of old Mrs. Auriol, who grumbled dreadfully ; but as this was a matter of everyday occurrence, nobody seemed to pay much attention to her, and it made very little difference to any of us, as she would have been equally certain to find fault with any other arrangement.

Wilfred Auriol, it seemed, was still obdurate to the attractions of Sophy Parkins, and was, as his mother informed me, “a confirmed old bachelor, and a great fool for his pains.” I may here add, that he still continues to cough, but with the assistance of his friendly beard, it is to be hoped he may yet live on, for some time to come. They tell me, he is much taken with the new Ritualistic movement, and is a very zealous admirer of Dr. Pusey, and a great advocate for confession ; but whether he has as yet, succeeded in persuading any of the young ladies of his congregation to take

this latter step, I am not prepared to inform you.

Sophy Parkins has adopted a kind of nunlike habit, and is not unlikely to end her days as the lady abbess, or mother superior of some Protestant sisterhood ; at least, so I am credibly informed by her aunt, Mrs. Pybus, who is, as you may suppose, exceedingly irate at the notion, and still considers it as a judgment upon William Parkins for having had the audacity to encourage the introduction of Conservative principles, into our Liberal little borough.

CHAPTER XV.

“ SHE SHINES ME DOWN.”

“ ‘ I have a smiling face,’ she said,
‘ I have a jest for all I meet ;
I have a garland for my head,
And all its flowers are sweet,—
And so you call me gay,’ she said.

“ ‘ Behind no prison-grate,’ she said,
‘ Which slurs the sunshine half-a-mile,
Are captives so uncomforted,
As souls behind a smile—
God’s pity let us pray,’ she said.”

ELIZA seemed to take more interest in her daughter, now that she was once more in a prosperous condition, and was delighted at

being asked to go to Osterley with James, on a visit.

She returned brimfull of anecdotes of "my daughter, Lady Osterley," and "darling, little Isleworth," and "that dear, noble, fellow, Osterley," who had insisted on her taking back some of Sydney's money,—which she would not have thought of doing, only really, Osterley was a very rich man now, and could quite well spare a few hundreds a-year, to Sydney's mother. Eliza became more amiable than I had seen her for a length of time, after this visit, and was a good deal looked up to, in Dumbleton, for being the mother of a Countess, which did almost as well, as being the mistress of Contango Abbey, and a rich woman—perhaps even better—for rich women were as common as black-berries in Dumbleton, but a Countess was quite a *rara avis*.

I think, no one rejoiced more sincerely in the happy termination to the great Osterley romance than Mrs. John Beaumont. Her uncle was also, she told me, delighted at their reconciliation, and Lady Venetia professed to be equally pleased. But Nora confessed to me, that she believed her aunt to be a broken-hearted woman. She was always restless and unsettled, Nora said ; she could not bear to be alone, or to stay at home, for an hour together ; and though her brother had not been dead six months, Lady Venetia was going out every night of her life. Her health suffered from the constant state of fever and excitement in which she lived ; and though she was reckoned as handsome and agreeable as ever, in society, Nora fancied she was much changed.

It happened in the course of the winter, that the John Beaumonts went for a few

days to stay with Sir Robert, in Belgrave Square, and then, Nora remonstrated seriously with her aunt on her mode of life, and entreated her to take more care of herself. But Lady Venetia, who was suffering at the time from a bad cold, and who was really ill and feverish, had been quite angry with her niece, for alluding to the subject.

"It is not of the slightest use," she said, "your trying to make me stay at home, Nora—I cannot do it, and that is the truth of the matter—I cannot exist without excitement."

"But it is killing you, Aunt Via—indeed it is," pleaded Mrs. Beaumont gently.

"Never mind that. It will be no great loss to the world, luckily. I have been a very unhappy and unfortunate woman. I have been true to nothing and to nobody. I have not been true to Sir Robert, (in the strictest sense of the word, I mean, of course), I have

not been true to Spencer, and I have not been true to myself. I threw over my engagement to Spencer early in life, because I dreaded a life of poverty, even with the man I loved. I married Sir Robert, whom I have never cared about, (though he has been very good to me), and I made him believe, that I did not care for Spencer any longer—though that was utterly false—because I was afraid of what people might say of me. Sir Robert would have forgiven me perhaps, had I told him the whole truth, but the world would never have forgotten it, and I had not courage enough to set the world at defiance, and so I have been false and cowardly all my life long. Spencer knows now, that I let the whole blame rest on him—though it was most unjust of me, to do so—and he too despises me ; but he must not know, that I have never ceased

to love him, as much as it is in my power to love any human being. And now, he is quite engrossed with his silly, little wife and his child, and they are everything to him, and I am nothing! I tell you, Nora, I am as much forgotten, as if I had never existed. No! don't ask me to stay at home and sit still, as you good, quiet, sensible women can do, who have all you want, and can afford to think. I cannot bear to be quiet, or to be left alone with my own miserable reflections. It is wretchedness to me, to be forced back upon myself. Don't torment me about it again, if you have the slightest regard left for me, Nora. Here is the carriage. I must go. Good night; see that Sir Robert has his tea and all his little comforts when he comes home. Poor man! he is worthy of a better wife than I have ever been to him."

So saying, Lady Venetia drove off to a ball, where she laughed, and talked, and flirted, and was admired, and was miserable.

No poor, painted clown at a fair, ever hid a more heavy heart, under a smiling face, than did this charming and popular fine lady, according to Nora's account, and I believe that Mrs. John Beaumont was not a woman likely to exaggerate, or to fancy things that were not perfectly true. I only saw Lady Venetia once again.

In the spring, after I came back from the Isle of Man, the Beaumonts had born to them a little girl, to whom they asked Sir Robert Verney to stand godfather. He readily consented, and begged the child might be called Venetia, adding, that he and his wife would both come to the christening. Lady Osterley was to be one of the god-mothers, and they came to stay for a few

days with Tom and me for the occasion. The Templecombes, who were in London at the time, expressed a desire to join the party, and Mr. Broke offered to come over from his new living, which was at no great distance, to perform the ceremony.

Nora determined to make quite a pleasant little gathering of old friends, and invited most of the leading people of Dumbleton to an afternoon party, at the Manor House. Of course, I went among the rest, and there I saw Lady Venetia Verney again. She had driven down from London, late in the afternoon, with a little retinue of young men, without whom, they told me, she seldom stirred. Sir Robert had ridden down alone before the christening, and the Templecombes came in their phaeton, with Mr. Quilp sitting between them, for Lord Templecombe was now quite as devoted to that

little monster as his wife was. I suppose the poor thing had his merits, though appearances were decidedly against him. I own, I was curious to see the first meeting between Lady Venetia and the Osterleys, and I was fortunate in being close to them at the moment she came in, followed by her train of youthful admirers.

Spencer and she, had seen each other several times in London, since his return from abroad, and also since his reconciliation to Sydney; but Sydney, she had never met since the night when the tent caught fire, and Sydney disappeared in the smoke.

Lady Venetia, however, with her usual *savior-faire*, showed no sign of embarrassment whatever. She advanced at once, to the place where Sydney was sitting, with her boy on her knee, and exclaimed in her old

empresée manner—"Ah! my dear Lady Osterley, how delighted I am to see you again! I thought we were never to meet! Why do you so seldom come to London? you idle creature! But a country life agrees with you, certainly. How well you are looking!—and this darling baby too. What a lovely child he is. Do let me give him a kiss."

At a little distance, no one could have detected a shade of nervousness in Lady Venetia's manner. I, being close to her, and watching her very narrowly, saw plainly that she was making a great effort to appear at her ease—her colour came and went—her lips, and even her hands trembled, and her heart beat quickly under her rich lace shawl, as I could easily discern.

Sydney was far more composed and comfortable. "Yes," she replied coolly, "it is

a long time since we met, Lady Venetia. I forgot, you had not seen Isley before. Is not he a great fellow for his age?—only just a year old! Don't you think him very like Spencer? I am so glad he is dark, and not a bit like me."

At this moment, appeared Lord Osterley, who glanced at Sydney, I fancied, a little anxiously, as if afraid she might find the ordeal a trying one; but she looked up and smiled at him so re-assuringly, that I saw at once, they understood each other thoroughly, and that she now placed implicit confidence in him. He turned to Lady Venetia with some trifling observation about the boy, who stretched out his arms to his father, and kicked and struggled with Lady Venetia, who still held him.

"So you are quite a model father, I see, Spencer," said her Ladyship, resigning the

child with a sigh. "Well, I am glad I have seen your boy at last—you have every right to be proud of him; but I have not seen Nora yet, and I must go and pay my respects to my little namesake. Lord Lawless, may I trouble you for my shawl. It is getting chilly, I think. Thank you, very much. I must introduce you to Mr. Beaumont. You, Mr. Ryder, and Sir Ralph Menzies, both know my niece, Nora Beaumont, I think. Shall we go and look for her? I suppose she is in the house."

Her little body guard, rallied round her immediately, and attended her to the drawing-room window most sedulously. Spencer did not offer to go with her, though she gave him an inviting look, as she rose from her seat.

"I suppose," he said, as soon as she was out of hearing, "that Via thinks there is safety in a multitude of adorers. I wonder

how long she will go on making fools of those fellows?"

"I only hope she will let them go, whenever they marry, Spencer," said Sydney, with a deep blush; "it won't so much matter till then."

"She has altered very much lately," pursued Spencer; "she is terribly made up now. Her beauty is going off, very fast. But Via is no longer young, she is older than I am."

"Or is it you, who have altered very much, lately?" asked Sydney, a little maliciously. "Perhaps eighteen months ago, you would not have discovered that Lady Venetia's bloom was fading a little; indeed, I don't see it now. She looks extremely handsome, I think, still; but then, she is always so beautifully dressed."

"I don't see that she is at all better

dressed than you are, Sydney," cried Spencer, jealously, "do you, Miss Lambert? I call Sydney's dress to-day, perfection."

I agreed, of course, but I could not help smiling at Spencer's indignation, when I thought how considerable a modification his opinions must have undergone, upon this all-important point, since first he married.

But, Sydney's presence was soon discovered by many of her old friends and acquaintances, who crowded round her, to pay their respects to Lady Osterley, and to admire the little Lord Isleworth. Lady Venetia Verney was now quite a secondary consideration with our Dumbleton worthies. A peeress (and one of our own rearing, too, as I may say), was something very superior in our humble, suburban opinion, and Sydney had certainly improved very much in beauty since she left Dumbleton. There

was no denying that fact; and as for his tiny Lordship, there never was such a child seen before—since the little Prince Imperial was born, at all events—he was so gracious, yet dignified in his bearing, so polite, and yet so grand in his manner to the crowd of Dumbleton ladies, young and old, who knelt at his feet and entreated him to give them just one kiss each. Even Mrs. Pybus condescended to pat him as gently as possible on the head, and to prophesy solemnly that he would one day be “an honour to his country.” Miss Wolff sighed, and protested that he would cause many heartaches to “young persons of the female sex,” before he died. Miss Amelia begged for the reversion of his worn-out clothing for a poor but respectable family, in whom she took great interest, and also for a lock of his hair for her own personal edification. Mr. Kib-

ble bestowed his blessing on the boy, and Mrs. Kibble pronounced that she really thought he was almost as fine a child as her own Julius had been at his age, which was saying a great deal, for Mrs. Kibble. But Mr. Auriol looked on at the scene with marked dissatisfaction, yet "more in sorrow than in anger." "He was grieved," he said, "to see the ladies of Dumbleton make themselves so ridiculous about a mere baby." His spirit has not as yet, in spite of all his endeavours, so subdued the creature, as to render it a pleasure to him, to look upon Sydney as the happy wife of another man, or to observe that she looked ten times more lovely and engaging than ever, in the character of a mother. Though Mr. Auriol had never mentioned his feelings to Sydney, he had not been at all the less enamoured of her for that. As Sir Walter

Raleigh justly observed, a couple of centuries ago—

“ Silence in love betrays more woe,
Than words, though ne’er so witty ;
A beggar that is dumb, you know,
May challenge double pity.”

And a double share of pity I do believe, was readily granted to Mr. Auriol, by his faithful ally Sophy Parkins, who stood near him and looked at him from time to time with unmistakable sympathy and affection.

This young lady had now retired very much from the world ; and though her parents objected to her leaving her home and entering a conventual establishment, they approved rather than otherwise, of her becoming an Associate of some Sisterhood recommended to them by Mr. Auriol, and also of her wearing a mitigated form of the Sister’s dress. So instead of grey serge,

Sophia, as at present advised, contented herself with grey silk, a long water-proof cloak, and a white, straw bonnet, of primitive fashion, with a long, white veil floating behind her, far below her waist. What object was served by wearing a veil hanging down her back, I really am unable to inform you ; but as Sophy invariably appeared in public with this appendage, of either black, or white gauze, and never made use of it in any other capacity, I presume it carried with it some peculiar virtue, known to herself, and perhaps also, to Mr. Auriol.

Selina Broke next appeared on the scene, with her little son toddling at her side, and the circle round Sydney, at once opened to admit this good-natured little lady, who had the right of *entrée* to the centre of attraction, as one of Lady Osterley's earliest friends.

Then Lord and Lady Templecombe came up, followed by the majestic Quilp, and then Mr. Quilp was made to do all his little tricks, (though it was a terrible blow to his dignity) — for the entertainment of the two children—and the shouts of laughter that ensued, roused the attention of Sir Robert, and Lord Osterley, who went to see what was going on, and continued their conversation as they stood watching the scene with some amusement. Selina Broke was laughing and talking, in her usual harum-scarum manner, about her boy and her poverty, while Lord Templecombe was anxiously inquiring after his old friends, Greenleaf and Mrs. Peacock, to whom he said, he had sent several hampers of game during the shooting season. All were so busily occupied, that nobody, except myself, I believe, noticed Lady Venetia pass close

to the merry, noisy group. She looked, I thought, wistfully at Lord Osterley as she went by, but Spencer's eyes were fixed on his wife and child, who were still playing with the dog, and he did not turn round, or even see that his old love was so near him. Lady Venetia sighed, and with a look of indescribable weariness and pain, she took the arm of one of her admirers, and sent another to look for her carriage, while she handed her shawl to the third; and so she disappeared from my view, leaving me with the impression that Nora was justified in asserting that the gay, the witty, and the beautiful Lady Venetia Verney was a profoundly unhappy woman.

She was a victim, not perhaps so much to wounded affection now, as to "dead love's harsh heir, jealous pride;" but, whatever the cause of her uneasiness may have been, three

things were very evident, viz., that Lady Venetia suffered deeply, in spite of all her efforts to conceal it ; that Lord Osterley had fallen in love with his own wife ; and that Sydney was one of the happiest women in existence.

POSTSCRIPT.

AND now, my little story, which was commenced as you know "by particular desire," has come to an end, and my task is finished.

Had I attempted to delineate any very horrible crimes, or violent passions, I am afraid that I should have made a total failure of it, for, to my knowledge, I have never yet, made the acquaintance of an habitual murderer, or even of a convicted bigamist—and I must confess, that I never met with a really well-authenticated, thorough-paced villain off the stage. Being (unfortu-

nately) incapable of describing the manners and appearance of a class of persons whom I never saw, I am still less able, to render you a faithful, but minute analysis of their inmost feelings, their secret thoughts, their incentives to action, and all the other little particulars of their mode of daily life, which go so far to make up a modern, sensational novel.

Under these melancholy circumstances, I have been obliged to content myself, with depicting a few mere, common-place men and women, such as we are all in the habit of meeting, every day of our lives.

If, some time, when you have nothing better to do, or are ill, or tired, or bored, you should be able to beguile a weary hour by the aid of these volumes, the object for which they were originally written, will have been accomplished, to my entire satisfaction.

Feeling secure of *your* sympathy and forbearance, I can afford to brave the criticism of the "general public." At the same time, I cannot help believing that Sheridan was right, when he said—

"Of this you may be assured, that while the intention is evidently to please, British Auditors (and, we will hope also, British Readers) will ever be indulgent to the errors of the performance."

THE END.



